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THE WORKS

OF

MISS THACKERAY

THE WORKS

OF

MISS THACKERAY

Anne Isabella (Thackeray), Lady Ritchie

VOLUME IX.

MISS WILLIAMSON'S

DIVAGATIONS

8/57

18/31

LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1882

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MISS WILLIAMSON'S DIVAGATIONS

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BY

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1882

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TO

JANE OCTAVIA BROOKFIELD

Some names are like Good Omens, we are told, and yours is one of these to all of us who love and belong to you. Will you, therefore, befriend my little book and accept a Dedication written in old and ever new affection by

A. I. R.

27 YOUNG STREET, KENSINGTON
March 1, 1881

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DA CAPO

CHAPTER I.

COLONEL BAXTER'S RETROSPECTIONS.

It is a curious experience to come back in after years to an old mood and to find it all changed and swept and garnished; emotionless, orderly now;—are the devils of indifference and selfish preoccupation those against which we are warned in the parable? Perhaps it is some old once-read and re-read letter which has brought it all back to you; perhaps it is some person quietly walking in, followed by a whole train of associations. Who has not answered to the call of an old tune breaking the dream of to-day? Is the past, past, if such trifles can recall it, or only not-present?

One day Colonel Baxter, an officer lately returned from abroad, came up to the door of an old house in Sussex, and stopped for an instant before he rang the bell. The not-present suddenly swept away all the fabric of the last few years. He stopped, looking for a little phantom of five years before that he could still conjure up, coming flitting along the terrace, gentle, capricious, lovely Felicia Marlow, as he remembered her at eighteen, and not so

happy as eighteen should be. She had once appealed to him for help, and it had needed all Colonel Baxter's years of service, all his standing in the army, all the courage of a self-reliant man, and all the energies of his Victoria Cross and many clasps to help him to withstand the innocent entreaty of those two wild grey eyes which had said 'Help me, help me!' The story was simple enough, and one which has been told before, of a foolish little creature who had scarcely been beyond the iron scrolls of the gates of Harpington Court, who had been promised to her cousin, the only man she had ever seen, and who suddenly finding a world beyond her own, had realised the possibility of a love that was not her cousin James's old familiar everyday, ever-since-she-could-remember, mood.

Colonel Baxter had seen the world and travelled far beyond Harpington, but nevertheless he, too, had been carried away by the touching vehemence of this poor little victim to circumstances, and felt that he could give his whole life to make her more happy. Only somehow it was not for him to make her happy. That right then belonged to James Marlow, who was Baxter's friend, and one of the best and most loyal of men.

Baxter walked up to the gates and stopped to look round, as I have said, before he rang. The place was changed. A new spirit seemed to have come over the periwinkle avenue. There were bright flowers in tubs at

intervals along the road; a couple of gardeners were at work in the sunshine, chipping, chopping, binding up all the drifts and wreaths, carefully nipping away all the desolate sweetness and carrying it off in wheelbarrows. Gay striped blinds were sprouting from the old diamond windows; Minton china twinkled on the terrace; the stone steps had been repaired and smartened up somehow; a green trellis had been nailed against the walls. It was scarcely possible to see in which of these trifling signs the difference lay, but it was unmistakable. Once more an old feeling seemed to come over the man as he tramped along the gravel walks with long even strides; a feeling of hopeless separation, of utter and insurmountable distance: all this orderly comfort seemed to come only to divide them. In the old days of her forlorn negligence and trouble Felicia had seemed nearer, far nearer than now. When he had come back after James's death, he had thought it wrong to obtrude his personal feelings. He was then under orders to rejoin his regiment. Before he went to India, he had written an ambiguous little message to Felicia Marlow, to which no answer had come; he had been too proud to write again; and now that he was home once more, an impulse had brought him back to her door. And he had listened to the advice of a woman whom he had always trusted, and who told him that he had been wrong and proud, and that he had almost deserved to lose the woman he loved.

A pert housemaid with a mob-cap opened the door, and to Colonel Baxter's enquiry replied that Miss Marlow was abroad, travelling with friends, Mr. and Mrs. Bracy and Mr. Jasper Bracy from Brayfield. She was not expected? O dear no; all letters were to be sent on to the hotel at Berne. 'Here is the foreign address,' says the housemaid, going to a table and coming back with a piece of paper.

A minute ago it had been on Baxter's lips to ask her to give him back a letter which he had posted himself only the day before, addressed to Miss Marlow, at Harpington, not to the Falcon Hotel, at Berne. But the sight of her writing, of a little flourish to the F, touched him oddly. When the lively housemaid went on to say that a packet was just a-going, and Baxter saw his own letter lying on the hall table, he gave the maid a card and asked her to put it in as well, and thoughtfully turned on his heel and walked away. Then he stopped, walked back a few steps once more along the terrace to a side window that he remembered, and he stood for an instant trying to recall a vision of that starry dim evening when the iron gates were first closed and he had waited, while Felicia flitted in through that shuttered window. He still heard her childish sweet voice; he could remember the pain with which he left her then; and now—what was there between them? Nothing. Baxter thought as he walked away that Felicia had been more really present this time in remem-

brance than the last time when he had really seen her, touched her hand, and found her at home indeed, but preoccupied, surrounded by adulating sympathisers, dressed in crape, excited, unlike herself, and passionately sobbing for James's death. Yes, she had once loved him better than that. It was not Felicia whom he had really seen that last time. He *must* see her again, her herself. She would get his letter; but what good was a letter? It had a voice perhaps, but no eyes, no ears. The Hôtel du Faucon at Berne was not a very long way off. Before he left the terrace, Baxter had made up his mind to go there.

I wrote this little story down many years ago. The people interested me at the time, for they were all well-meaning folks, moving in a somewhat morbid atmosphere, but doing the best they could under difficult circumstances. There was the young couple, who had been engaged from childhood, without, as I have said, much knowledge of anything outside the dreary old home in which Fate had enclosed their lives. There was an old couple, whose experience might have taught them better than to try and twine hymeneal garlands out of dead men's shoes, strips of parchment, twigs and dried leaves off their genealogical tree, with a little gold tinsel to bind them all up together. The saving clause in it all was that James Marlow truly loved his cousin Felicia; but this the old folks scarcely took into account; and it was for quite different reasons

that they decreed the two should be one. And then came human nature in the shape of a very inoffending and unconscious soldier, a widower with one child, a soldier of fortune without a fortune, as he called himself, whereas James Marlow, the hero of this little tragedy (for it *was* a tragedy of some sort), was the heir to the estate, and a good man, and tenderly attached to his cousin. But, nevertheless, the little heroine's heart went away from mousy old Harpington, and flashed something for itself which neither grandmother nor grandfather had intended, and which Felicia herself did not quite understand. James Marlow, perhaps, of them all was the person who most clearly realised the facts which concerned these complicated experiences.

Felicia found out her own secret, in shame and remorse; one day she discovered that it was not James her affianced husband, but Baxter whom she loved, and James, who had found it out, kept silence, for he too had a secret, and knew that for him a very short time must break the solemnest engagements. He did full justice to Felicia's impulsive vivid-hearted nature; to the honesty of the man she preferred to himself.

The three had parted under peculiar circumstances. James had been sent abroad by the doctors as his last chance for life, and before he went he had said something to Felicia, and Baxter not one word. The Captain, as he was then, was faithfully attached to James; he went

abroad with his friend, and remained with him while he lived and tended him in those journeys, and administered those delusive prescriptions which were to have cured him. The air was so life-giving, the doctors spoke so confidently, James himself was almost deceived at one time.

His was a wise heart, and a just one, consequently; if he had lived he would have done his part to make those he loved happy, even though their own dream of happiness should not include his own. But life was stern to him from the first; he had few chances, except, indeed, that of being a good man, and knowing the meaning of a few commonplace words, such as duty, love, friendship. From a child he had been always ailing and sensitive. When he found that his happiness (it had been christened Felicia some eighteen years before) was gone from him, it made him languid, indifferent, his pulse ebbed away, not even African sun could warm him, he would have lived if he could, but he was not sorry to die; and when he found he was dying, he sent a message home to 'his sweet happiness,' so he spoke of her.

Baxter had come back to England, with his heart sore for his friend's loss, and neither he nor Felicia, who had been wearying and pining to see him again, could find one word, when they met, except words of grief. In those days it had seemed to them both that it would be wronging James's memory to speak of their own preoccupations at

such a time; so little do people with the best hearts and intentions trust each other, or those who have loved them most. Baxter had not come to Harpington, but to London, where Felicia was staying with her aunt in Queen's Square. The old butler showed him up the old staircase, looked round, and then went to the window and said, 'Miss Felicia, you are wanted. Here is Colonel Baxter.'

She had come into the room to speak to him, stepping across the window-sill from the balcony, where she had been sitting. How well he remembered it, and the last time they had been there together. That was in the evening, and Jim had been alive. Now it was morning, and Felicia wore her black dress; a burning autumn morning, striking across the withered parks in broad lines of dusky light. They flooded through the awnings, falling upon Felicia's mourning robes, making the very crape and blackness twinkle. But Felicia's face somehow put out the light; it was pale, and set, and wan. There was no appeal in it now. She frightened Baxter for a moment; then, when he saw her hands tremble, a great longing came to him to hold them fast, to be her help and comforter once more and to befriend this forlorn though much-loved woman. He talked on quickly to hide his emotion. He gave her the few details she wanted.

'Jim told me to come and see you,' he concluded. 'He thought I might perhaps be your friend, Felicia,' said Baxter, 'and he sent you his love. . . .'

Baxter turned pale, and his voice faltered; he hardly knew how to give the remainder of James's message, which was to tell Felicia that she must let Baxter take care of her now. James sent them both his blessing. Perhaps he might have said the words, but the door opened, and another Miss Marlow came bustling in; Aunt Mary Anne, a stout, beaming, good-natured, and fussy lady, with many bugles and ornaments and earrings, and a jet-bespangled bonnet rather awry, and two fat black kid hands put out.

'Here he is! Here is our Captain. How is he? They told me you were here; how glad I am to see you. You two poor dears have been having a sad talk, I daresay. Well, it is a good thing got over. It's no use dwelling on what can't be helped. You don't look well, Baxter; you must come and let us nurse you up.' And then, as she grasped Colonel Baxter's hands, 'We must make the best of what is left us. Eh, Felicia?' said the fat lady, who hated anything in the shape of grief, and only tolerated its bugles and lighter ornaments. 'No, we won't speak of the past—better not—now tell us how long you can stay.' And the old aunt, who took things so easy, began to wink and nod at the poor little passionate-hearted girl, to whom all this seemed like some horrible mockery—like ribald talk in a sacred place. Felicia and Baxter both began to shrink before the old lady's incantations. Felicia had wiped her tears, and stood silent and dull. Baxter

was cold, vexed, and ajar. He saw Felicia's averted looks; his own face grew dark. He could not remain in London; he said he had not yet been to his own home. His little girl was at Brighton with his cousin Emily. And while Miss Marlow the elder, disappointed in her well-meant efforts to cheer up the young people, was remonstrating, and scolding, and threatening to appeal to Flora Bracy, whoever she might be, Baxter stood, looking abstractedly at Felicia, and Felicia drew herself away farther and farther.

'Perhaps you will let me hear from you, when you can see me again,' said Baxter, taking leave with some sudden change of manner.

'Yes, yes; you shall hear from us,' cried Miss Marlow the elder, giving him a friendly tap on the shoulder; young Miss Marlow dropped her eyes, with a sigh, and did not speak. And so he had walked away and out into the street, disappointed. It had not been the meeting he had hoped for; it had not been the meeting Felicia hoped it might have been. They had neither of them made a sign to the other.

'You sly thing; I know you will write to him as soon as you get back, though you won't let me write now,' her aunt used to say; and Felicia would shake her head

'It seems to me that, for dear James's sake, you ought to show him some attention,' persists the old lady.

Was it indeed for James's sake only, or for her own,

that Felicia wished to see Baxter? This was a question she could never answer. She went back to Harpington, and day after day Felicia put off writing; and Baxter was too proud to go unsummoned. And then a thousand chances and less generous feelings intervened, and time went on, and on, and on; and James might have never lived for all the good his self-sacrifice had brought about to the two people he held most dear.

CHAPTER II.

FELICIA'S RETROSPECTIONS.

In the first part of my story I have described how Felicia lived at Harpington with her grandmother, old Mrs. Marlow, the original match-maker—a strange and somewhat stony-faced old lady, who did not seem always quite in her right mind. Her presence frightened people away. She seemed to have been years before frozen by some sudden catastrophe, and to be utterly indifferent to everything that happened now. She had no love for Felicia. It was almost as if she resented the poor child's very existence. Felicia's betters were gone; her grandfather, her father, her mother, her young aunts and uncles, a whole blooming company had passed away. What business had Felicia to live on, to gather in her one little hand all the possessions which for years past had been amassed for others?

Sorrow for the dead seemed to take the shape of some dull resentment against the living in this bitter woman's mind. All Felicia's grace and loving readiness failed to touch her. Fay did her best and kept to her duty, as well

as she knew how. It was a silent duty, monotonous, ungrateful; it seemed like gathering figs off thorns, or grapes off thistles, to try and brighten up this gloomy woman. Felicia knew there was one person who would gladly, at a sign from her, respond to the faintest call; but, as I have said, some not unnatural scruple withheld her from sending for him. She hoped he would come to her, but *she* would move no finger, say no word, to bring him. She kept the thought of him as she had done all these years, shyly in the secret recesses of her heart. She was so young that the future was still everything—the present mattered little. Young people seem to have some curious trust in their future consciences, as older ones look back with sympathy to their past selves.

After all, it was not very long before Felicia saw Aurelius again; but not in the way she had hoped to see him. She had ridden into Lewes on some commission for her grandmother—I think it was a sleeping draught that the old lady fancied. It was a lovely autumn afternoon; old Caspar snuffed the fresh air; young Felicia sprang into her saddle with more life than she had felt since their trouble had fallen upon them. George, the weather-beaten coachman, was there to follow in his battered blue livery. He opened the gates when Felicia had not jumped down before him. The two jogged along the country lanes together, George's blear eyes faithfully fixed on Caspar's ragged tail. The road was delightful, white drifting

wreaths of briony seemed to lie like foam upon the branches, ivies crept green along the ditches, where the very weeds were turning into gold and silver, while the branches of the trees overhead were also aglow in the autumnal lights. It was a sweet triumphant way. The girl's spirit rose as she cantered along between the garlands that spread on either side of it. There is one place where the road from Harpington crosses the road to Lewes, just where an old mill stands by a stream, with its garden and farm buildings. The fence was low, and as Felicia peeped over she could see a garden full of sweet clustering things mingling with vegetables, white feathery bushes, and bowers of purple clematis, and here and there crimson fiery tongues, darting from their stems along the box-lined paths, and yellow roses against the walls. She could hear a sound of horses, and of voices calling and dogs barking in the mill-yard beyond the garden. The flowers seemed all the sweeter for the busy people at work. Felicia began to build up one of her old fancy-pieces as she lingered for a moment by the hedge; perhaps some day they might walk there together, and he would look down into her face and say the time has come, the time has come. Then she started, blushed up, tightened old Caspar's rein again, and set off once more, riding quickly past the old sign-post that pointed to Harpington with one weather-beaten finger, and to Lewes, whither she was going. There was a third road leading to

the downs—it was only a continuation of the Harpington lane.

The mill was near an hour's ride from Lewes, that pretty old country town with its bustle of new things cheerfully mixing up with the old—its many children at play and its many busy people stirring among the old gables and archways, and its flocks making confusion in the market.

Felicia left old Caspar to be cared for at the inn, while she went off upon her shopping, being, girl-like, delighted with the life and bustle of the place. She herself was perhaps not the least pleasant sight there, as she darted in and out of the old doorways and corners, holding up her long skirt, and looking out beneath the broad brim of her dark beaver hat. It was late before she had done. The town clocks were striking six as they turned their horses' heads towards Harpington. There is a long level stretch of road at the foot of the hill, with poplars growing on either side, and tranquil horizons between the poplar stems. Felicia trotted on ahead; old George jogged after her, pondering upon his crops and the price of wheat, which he had been discussing in the bar of the Red Lion.

Evening was falling: the oxen looked purple in the light, as they stood staring across the fences at the road and the horses, and slowly tossing their white horns. The shadows under the trees were turning blue, the evening birds were flying across the sky—a tranquil dappled sky,

with clouds passing in fleecy banks, while the west spread its crimson wings. All the people were crossing and re-crossing the paths to the villages beyond the fields; in one place Felicia could see the boats gliding along the narrow river. Then they came to the old mill at the cross-roads. The garden was resplendent with clear evening light: the great cabbages seemed dilating and showing every vein; each tendril of the vines, wreathed along the wooden palings, stood out vivid and defined. As Felicia advanced, urging old Caspar along, she saw a figure, also on horseback, coming along the road from Harpington. It was but for a moment, but in that moment Felicia seemed to recognise the rider: his square shoulders, the slouch of his broad hat. He crossed the highway and took the lane leading to the downs: he did not look to the right or to the left. Felicia's heart gave a throb. She suddenly slashed old Caspar into a canter, and reached the corner where she thought she had just seen Baxter pass. She looked up and down. 'Did not somebody go by, George?' Felicia said, turning round to the old gardener. 'I can see no one in the lane. It must a' been a goast,' said old George, staring, 'or maybe it wer' a man that leapt the fence onto yon field: there'll be a short cut along by that thar way,' says George, who had followed his master, the late Squire, along many a short cut and long road. Felicia said no more; she turned Caspar's head towards home, and the old horse

stepped out, knowing his way back. To Felicia the way seemed suddenly very long. The road was dusty and bare; the garlands seemed to have lost their fragrant bloom. Her grandmother was up when she got back. Tea was laid in the parlour, and the windows were open on to the terrace.

'Here you are at last,' said Mrs. Marlow. 'That Captain Baxter has been here. He is going away again to India. Have you got me my sleeping draught?'

'Did he leave *no* message for me; nothing?' said Felicia.

'He left his card,' said the old lady. 'Take care, don't shake the bottle; what are you about! I want a good night's rest. That man talked about James, he upset me. I had to send him away. He would have kept me awake at night if I had let him talk on any longer.' And then Mrs. Marlow hobbled off to her old four-post bed, crumpling up Baxter's card in her fingers. 'I *must* see you once more,' he had written upon it; 'send me one line.' Mrs. Marlow threw the card into her fire-place. Felicia never saw the pencil words. She was left alone—quite alone, she said to herself bitterly. He had left her no word, he was gone without a thought of her, and everything seemed forlorn once more.

Old Mrs. Marlow survived her grandson for a year; half imbecile, never quite relenting to the poor little granddaughter, and then she too passed away, and Felicia

inherited the old house and the broad stubble fields and the farm yards and haycocks, among which she and her cousin James had both grown up together. And now Felicia belonged to that sad company of heiresses, with friends and a banker's account, and consideration and liberty, in place of home and loving interest and life multiplied by others.

She came; she went; she travelled abroad. She was abroad when Baxter came to Harpington for the second time in vain. He had been in India hard at work, and little Felicia had been leading her own life for the last three years. Everything seemed to be hers except the things which might have made everything dear to her. She had scarcely been conscious of any want; she was never alone—never neglected. Futile interests, small events, came by every post, twopenny pleasures, sixpenny friendships, small favours asked and cheap thanks returned. It was a disappointing life she sometimes thought, nothing satisfied her; was she changed, she wondered, and yet she was the same Felicia after all that Baxter remembered so fondly, as he walked away from the door.

CHAPTER III.

ON THE TERRACE AT BERNE.

THERE is a stone basin full of water in an old city in Switzerland, over which a shady stream of foliage waves against the sun. The city arms are emblazoned upon the stone, and the flood of green overflows its margin. In the autumn the leaves glow, gleam, change into flame and ashes, tendrils hang illumined over the brimming fountain, which reflects the saffron and the crimson overhead. The townswomen come and fill their brazen pans and walk away leisurely, swinging their load and splashing the footway. The sloping street leads to a cathedral, of which the bells come at stated hours, suddenly breaking the habitual silence, and echoing from gable to gable.

Our young English lady passing by one autumn day went and stood for an instant by the fountain, leaning over its side. The naïads, in their Sunday bodices and well-starched linen, who were already there filling their brazen cans, watched her with some interest, and looked curiously at the stranger's bright startled eyes, her soft grey felts and feathers, and her quick all-pervading looks. They themselves were of the placid broad-faced, broad-

shouldered race of naïads who people Switzerland, who haunt the fountains; who emerge from châlets and caves with sparkling cups in their hands; who invite you to admire their fresh watercourses through kaleidoscopes of various tints.

There is a certain sameness, but an undeniable charm about Swiss maidens, especially on Sundays, when they put on their pretty silver ornaments, plait their shining tails of hair, while their fresh and blooming faces certainly do credit to their waters. Felicia had been standing interested and absorbed for some minutes. She was watching the stream flow on; wondering whether life hard won in the Bernese valleys would not be more satisfying on the whole than it seemed to her day by day, flowing, unheeded, in her own lonely and luxurious home. Presently she caught a whispered comment from one nymph to another, 'She is not alone; here is the company coming from the Falcon to find her.' Then Miss Marlow started, looked up, hastily turned away, and began walking determinedly away along the street. She had come out to avoid her company, that was the truth. For a week she had been travelling with them and glad to be in their society, but that morning a letter had reached her from home which had strung her to some other key, and which made her want to be alone for a little to realise her own mind, to hear her own voice, and to listen to that of an old friend speaking across five years. Was Baxter right

when he thought that a letter was nothing? his letter certainly was a great deal for Felicia. They had never had one word of explanation before or since they parted. There had been no promise given on either side; and yet she had considered herself in some implied way bound to this absent person whom she had not seen twenty times before James Marlow died, and who had not come back to her, except once with a shy, cruel, stiff message.

Felicia flitted away, as preoccupied as Baxter himself had been with certain events of former years. The houses on either side of the street stood upon their arches, the broad roofs cast their shadows, the quaint turrets turned to daily domestic use protruded from the corners, pigeons flew whirring across her footsteps. The street was called the *Street of the Preachers.* Felicia spelt it out, written high against a gable, and as she read the words all the cathedral chimes began preaching overhead, sounding, vibrating, swinging through the air; the sunlight broke out more brightly, doors opened and figures passed out on their way to the cathedral, from whence a little christening procession came slowly to meet her. It was headed by a sleeping baby lying peacefully frilled and pinned on to a huge lace pillow, with a wreath of silver flowers round its little head. On its placid little breast a paper was laid with a newly bestowed name carefully written out, with many simple-minded flourishes. . . .

A little farther on a closed house opened, and a tall

and solemn-looking personage issued forth, with a short Geneva gown, and a huge starched ruffle round his chin, walking with a deliberate step. The apparition crossed the piazza, passed under the statue (it seemed to be brandishing a bronze sword in its country's defence, against the scattered and mutilated wreaths that lay on the steps at the horse's feet); then the cathedral doors opened wide to receive this quaint ghost of another time and faith. It passed on with one or two people who had been standing round about. The bells gave a last leap of welcome, and then were silent, and the doors closed with a solemn bang. . . . Felicia noted it all, interested in spite of herself, and her own abstractions. Sometimes in our perplexities the lives of other people seem to come to reassure us. Have they not too been anxious, happy, died, lived, walked from house to house, stood outside and inside cathedral porches, as little Felicia stood now, staring at the saints over the doorway? It was a whole generation of ornamental sanctities, all in beatitude no doubt, and independent of circumstances: some were placidly holding their heads in their hands, some contemplating their racks, others kneeling on perilous ledges. Felicia was no saintly character, but she had gone through a certain gentle martyrdom in her life, short as it was. Now she took her letter out of her pocket, and looked at it thoughtfully, and read it once again. It had been sent on to her from her own house, and had been waiting for her at the hotel when she

arrived that morning, with a pile of bills, invitations, demisemiquavers of notes, in the midst of all of which this chord suddenly sounded:—

'My dear Miss Marlow—I have thought it possible that you have understood the reason which has prevented me from troubling you all this long time, and which made me wish for some sign from you, before I again asked to see you. Before I left England it seemed to me more and more difficult to see you or to come unasked to Harpington without probable misconstruction. In India one report reached me after another; and on my return home some not unnatural feeling prevented a proud man from wishing to appear to put himself into competition with a crowd of others, whose personal advantages seemed undeniable. I now think that for many reasons, my own peace of mind being one of them, this indefinite estrangement between two old friends should not continue. I am at home again for six months, and staying at The Cottage, with my little girl and my aunt, and my cousin Emily Flower. I shall come to-morrow to see you, and to hear from your own lips upon what terms you would wish henceforward that we should meet.

'Believe me always

'The Cottage, Faithfully yours,

'Harpington. A. H. BAXTER.'

It was a difficult letter to read; was it very difficult to

answer? Felicia was both hurt and touched; hurt by the long mistrust and doubt which was implied by this delay, touched by this long-delayed confidence. If the writer had only come to her as James had no doubt intended him to do, helped her in her hours of loneliness and sorrow, proved himself the stay and comfort for which she had longed, how happy they might have been all this time; if instead of speculating anxiously, comparing his advantages with those of others who were nothing to her, he had but forgotten himself for her, how different these last few years would have seemed to her, how much less sad, less drearily gay, less noisy, less confused. She had had a right to be hurt. Did he deserve forgiveness now?—If he had really loved her would he have treated her so cruelly? or did he only think that she loved him. Her eyes filled with tears, tender angry drops that she impatiently dashed away.

Felicia walked on beyond the cathedral gates to the terrace close by; with its delightful autumn garden for children and old people, with its view of the wide valley, of the line of distant hills beyond the walls. All the leaves were falling from the trees, and the brown chestnuts were dropping with the sudden swift gusts of wind; the country flushed with a bright tumult of sunshine and clouds: the river rolled with a full silver rush; the streets below were piled up against the very foot of the dizzy terrace walls; as seen from the high cliff the Bernese men and women

seemed like toys for children to play with, tiny figures that passed and repassed, intent upon their liliput affairs, upon rolling a barrel or turning a wheel, or upon piling a stack of wood; in windows and garrets, upon terraces and outstanding balconies, everywhere people were occupied, passing and repassing. The whole business of their microscopic life seemed scarcely so important as the children's game on the cathedral terrace—they were shouting as they ran, and picking up dry leaves and brown shining chestnuts that fell from the trees.

Felicia was standing against the terrace wall, still reading her letter, still thinking over the meaning of its somewhat abrupt sentences. They were not unlike Baxter's own way of speaking, stiff, abrupt, melting now and then for an instant, and then repelling again. The girl covered her eyes with her hand, trying to recall the vivid past more vividly. She was changed, this she knew, since those childish days when her whole heart's emotion had overpowered her so easily, and she had appealed in vain against her cruel condemning fate; she wanted something more now than she had wanted then; she had learned to mistrust her own impulses as well as those of the people she lived with. She wanted to trust, as well as to feel; she wanted proof as well as the expression of good-will. Poor little Felicia, it was not for nothing that she had been an heiress all this while, warned, flattered, surrounded, educated by cruel experience. All that was past

now in her short life seemed suddenly in existence again, came as a wave in between her and the man she had loved; it seemed to float them asunder as she conjured up his image. As she wiped her eyes, her heart seemed to cease beating for an instant. What extraordinary realisation was this?—who was this coming across the shadow of the chestnut tree? Felicia, looking up with a start, found herself face to face with a tall man who had slowly followed her all this time; it was Baxter himself, the hand that had written the letter was held out to her, and the letter seemed to take voice and life. The strangest things cease to be strange after a moment. Miss Marlow was accustomed to face possibilities, and as for Colonel Baxter, had he not followed her all the way from the fountain?

'I was—I was reading it,' she said, all confused and looking more lovely than he had ever seen her look before.

Colonel Baxter's only answer was to hold out his hand. Miss Marlow flushed crimson, and looked up into his face an instant before she took it. He was altogether unaltered; he did not look older, he did not look gladder. He was moved, but less so than she was; his dark face seemed pale somehow, and thin; she could not see very clearly, she was too much troubled and excited.

First meetings are curious things, all the long habit of separation seems still to be there; all the long days that have come to divide, the very anxieties and preoccu-

pations that have made the time so heavy, now seem to thrust themselves in between those who have yearned for each other's presence, and the absent are come home at last, but as people are not quite gone when they first depart, so they are not always quite come when they meet after long separation.

'Thank you for writing to me, Colonel Baxter,' said Felicia more quietly, and regaining her composure.

'I heard you were abroad, from your housekeeper,' said Colonel Baxter, 'and I thought that—that I might as well follow my letter,' he said, with an odd expression. All this time he had been so afraid of what Felicia might think; and now she was there before him, more charming, more beautiful even than he had remembered her. His scruples were all forgotten; they seemed unkind, almost cruel. Her eyes fell beneath his look, her face changed, a dazzle of sunlight came before his eyes; it may have been the falling leaves, the wind stirring among the branches, it may have been his own long pent emotion, but it seemed to him suddenly as if he could read what was passing in her mind, as if some vibration had swept away all outward conventional signs. He was a silent man usually, not given to much expression, but at this moment the feeling that had long been in his heart overmastered everything else. What was her money to him at that instant, or his own disadvantages? He even tried to remember them, but he could not recall one single impediment between them.

'You do not know what a struggle it has been to me to keep away! Can you forgive me?' he said; going straight to the point—ignoring all he had meant to say—to explain—to withhold.

'I do not quite forgive you,' said Felicia, smiling with tears, and once more responding to this new never-forgotten affection, by some instinct against which she could not struggle. As they stood there a swift western gale began to blow, the leaves showered from the trees, the chestnuts dropped over the terrace and beyond the wall, the children scampered through the changing lights. What had not happened in this moment's meeting! 'No, I can't quite forgive you,' repeated Miss Marlow. 'Where have you been all this time? What have you been doing? What were you thinking of?'

He could scarcely answer for a minute, though he looked so calm. He was more really overcome perhaps than she was; he was blaming himself unsparingly, wondering at his pride, the infatuation which had kept them apart, wondering at her outcoming pardoning sweetness and welcome. Baxter, who had been embittered by various mischances; Felicia Marlow, whose pretty little head had been somewhat turned of late by the dazzling compliments and adulations which she had met with, had both forgotten everything in the present, and met each other with their best and truest selves; surprised by the chance which seemed at last to have favoured them.

Details did not exist for either of them. At that minute Felicia felt that the future was there facing her with the serious and tender looks. Baxter also thought that at last, leaving all others, she had come straight to him, confiding with perfect trust. With a silent triumph, almost painful in its intensity, he held her hand close in his.

'Nothing shall ever come between us again,' he said. 'Nothing—no one.' Was Fate displeased by his presumption? As he spoke a cheerful chorus reached them from behind, a barking of dogs, a chatter of voices. Felicia blushing, drew her hand away from Baxter. In one instant the couple seem surrounded—ladies, gentlemen, parasols, a pugdog.

'Here you are, we saw you from the Place; why did you run away?' cries a voice. Felicia, with gentle confusion, began to name everybody: 'Mrs. Bracy, Mr. Jasper, Mr. Bracy, Miss Harrow. Dear Mrs. Bracy, you remember our James's friend, Colonel Baxter.'

'We have met in Queen's Square,' said Mrs. Bracy, with her most graciously concealed vexation. Had she not brought Felicia abroad expressly to avoid Colonels of any sort?

CHAPTER IV.

BEARS IN THEIR DENS.

BAXTER found it almost impossible to adjust himself suddenly to these unexpected circumstances, to these utter strangers, complacently dispersing his very heart's desire—so it seemed to him.

The results seemed so very small, compared to the intolerable annoyance inflicted upon himself. His was not the best nor the most patient of tempers, and he would gladly have dropped Mr. and Mrs. Bracy, Mr. Jasper, and Miss Harrow too over the terrace at a sign from Felicia. But she gave no sign, she seemed, could it be, almost relieved by their coming. In one instant all his brief dream, his shelter of hope seemed shaken, dispersed: not one of these people but came in between him and her; they did it on purpose. Couldn't they see that they were in the way? I am not sure that Mrs. Bracy did not do it on purpose. She took the Colonel in at a comprehensive glance; that look seemed to him to be a wall of well-polished plate-glass, let down between him and Felicia, who had in some confusion accepted Mr. Bracy's arm, and was already walking away and leaving Baxter to his fate.

'We are going to the Bears,' cried Mr. Bracy, over his shoulder. 'Flora, are you equal to the walk, my love? Jasper, take care of your aunt. What are you looking at?'

The individual called Jasper started at this address. He had been standing motionless, gazing up at the sky, and he now turned round. He was a young man about five or six and twenty, peculiar in appearance, and curiously dressed; his hair was frizzed out something in the same fashion as his aunt's own locks. He wore an orange cravat, a blue linen shirt, rings upon his forefingers, buckles to his shoes, a silver pin was fastened to his wide felt hat. He was handsome, with one of those silly expressions which come from too much intelligent detail.

'I beg pardon,' said he. 'That amber cloud floating in ultra-marine called me irresistibly;' and he pointed and stood quite still for an instant as actors do at the play, who have of course to emphasise their movements as well as their words. Felicia had no great sense of humour, and to her Jasper Bracy's performance was most serious and important. Baxter could hardly help laughing, at least he might have laughed if he had been less disturbed.

Mrs. Bracy was a lady of about fifty; she must have been handsome once. Her dark hair was nearly black, her features still retained a somewhat regal dignity of hook and arch, her brow was shiny and of the same classic proportions as her conversation.

'Do you wish to see the bears? Do you not agree with me, Colonel Baxter, that it is a cruelty to keep such noble animals in durance vile?' said Flora, turning to Aurelius, who looked very black and brown, and likely to growl himself.

'What do you say to a study from the life, my dear aunt?' said Jasper, joining in. 'There are some men up at the Faucon on their way to Poland bear-shooting, next month. I should not be sorry to join them and to make a few sketches from the dead carcase.'

'Jasper, do not talk of such horrible necessities,' said his aunt. 'My husband must show you some lines I wrote upon "Living Force restrained by the Inert,"' continued she, with a roll of her glossy eyes, 'which bear upon the stern necessities of Fate. Colonel Baxter, you do not seem to catch my meaning.'

Felicia, who was a few steps ahead, turned at this moment, hearing Mrs. Bracy's remonstrances; and her kind grey eyes beamed some little friendly signal to the poor disconcerted Colonel, who tried to overmaster his ill-humour, and to attend to the authoress's quotations, and abruptly asked what was meant by 'the inert.'

'Bars, bars,' said Flora, 'those bars of circumstances that weigh upon us all; upon you, I dare say—upon myself. What is *this* but a bar, through which no woman can pass?' and she held up her fat finger, with the wedding ring which Mr. Bracy had doubtless placed there.

While Mrs. Bracy, now well launched in metaphor, revelled on from sentence to sentence, Baxter's attention wandered; he was watching the slight graceful figure ahead flitting over the stones by Mr. Bracy's dumpy little form, only he listened when Felicia's friend began to speak of Felicia. They had left the terrace by this time, and were walking down a shady side street. 'Dear child,' Mrs. Bracy was saying, and she pointed to Felicia with her parasol, 'those who have her welfare at heart must often wonder what fate has in store for one so strangely gifted. You may think what an anxious charge it is for *me*, who am aware of all Felicia's exquisite refinement and sensitiveness of disposition. I have known her from childhood, although circumstances at one time divided us' (the circumstances being that until three years before Mrs. Bracy had never taken the slightest notice of little Felicia). 'There are many persons who, from a subtle admixture of feelings, are attracted by our sweet heiress,' continued the lady. 'I will not call them interested, and yet in my heart I cannot but doubt their motives. You, Colonel Baxter, will, I am sure, agree with me in despising the mercenary advances of these—shall I call them ?—soldiers of fortune.' Aurelius could hardly force himself to listen to the end of Mrs. Bracy's tirade, and gave her one black angry look, then suddenly strode on two or three steps, joined Felicia, and resolutely kept by her side. She looked up, hearing his step, but though she smiled she continued silent. She

would not, indeed she could not, talk to Baxter about in different subjects. Just at that moment she wanted quiet, to collect her nerves and to calm her mind. One vivid impression after another seemed to overcome her. Aurelius attracted and frightened her too; he seemed to have seized upon her, and half-willingly, half-reluctantly, she had let herself be carried away. It was a new Aurelius, a new Felicia, since that moment upon the terrace. Mr. Bracy rattled on with his usual good-humoured inconsequence. Mrs. Bracy caught them up at every opportunity. Jasper, who prided himself upon his good breeding, showed no sign of the annoyance he may perhaps have felt at the unexpected advent of this formidable rival, for needless to say it was to charm Felicia that these strange attitudes and ornaments were assumed, and that Jasper sang his song.

By degrees Miss Marlow's composure returned. She was able to talk and be interested as the others were, to look at the dresses of the peasant people, at the little children in their go-carts, at the streams above the bridge and below it, at the green river rushing between the terraces and the balconies; she was able to throw buns to the bears, and to laugh when they rolled over on their brown woolly backs, with crimson jaws wide stretched; she was still a child in some things, and when she caught sight of the Colonel's face she almost resented his vexed look. Why did he look so black? Why didn't he laugh at the bears' antics? Poor fellow; Mrs. Bracy's conversation might

well account for any depression on his part. She seemed to scintillate with allusions.

Fortune hunters? the future of woman! Felicia's rare delicacies of feeling, and her own deep sympathies, which enabled her and her only to know what would be suited to that young creature's requirements; she seemed to have taken such complete stock of the poor little thing, that Aurelius wondered what would be left for any other human being. He knew it was absurd to be so sensitive. He might have trusted the woman who had loved him for years and years, but at this moment Mrs. Bracy's monotonous voice was ringing in his brain.

It seemed to him, notwithstanding all his experience and long habit of life and trust in Felicia, that he was already suspected. Was he to subject himself to this suspicion for any woman's sake? Had he placed his hopes upon some one utterly and entirely beyond his reach? Was not that the refrain of it all? Did Felicia mean him to be subjected to all this? She did not seem to interfere; she avoided him; and yet, surely, they had understood each other when they had met only a few minutes ago. He could endure it no longer. He came up to Miss Marlow, and said abruptly: 'I am going back to the hotel now; will you come with me?'

'We are all coming,' said Felicia, looking eagerly around; 'don't leave us.'

'I cannot stand your friend's conversation any longer,

said Aurelius, not caring who heard him. 'She is the most intolerable woman.'

Felicia seemed to be gazing attentively at the bears, as she bent far over the railing. 'You should not speak like that,' she said, very much annoyed. 'They are all so kind to me. What do you want?'

'I want to see you,' he said, standing beside her. 'I want to talk to you; and I wonder you don't see how cruelly you are behaving, keeping me in this horrible suspense.'

'One more sugarplum, my Felicia, to give your four-footed friends,' here says a voice just behind them, and a fat hand is thrust between them with a peppermint between the finger and thumb.

Baxter turned angrily away. 'This is insupportable,' he muttered.

Felicia looked after him reproachfully; he walked straight off; he crossed the Place, he never looked back; he left her, feeding the bears with sugarplums; left her to Mrs. Bracy, pointing out the advantages of national liberty, and the tints of the mountains, to Felicia, to Miss Harrow, to anyone who would listen. Jasper, his aunt knew by experience, was not a good listener; he would compose himself into an attitude of profound attention, but his eye always wandered.

I suppose Felicia wanted a little time to think it all over, and to understand what had happened, and that was

why she took no decisive step concerning her new lover. A curious feeling—surprise and confidence and quiet expectancy—seemed to have come over her. Baxter's impatient words had startled her. It was something she was unprepared for. Was this love, this sudden unaccustomed rule?—was she in future to be at another person's call? She had not taken the Colonel's character into account; she had never thought about his character, to tell the truth, only that he had come, that the story of her youth had begun again. He had come as she knew he would, and she had all but promised to be his wife. She did not want to go back from her word; but she wanted to wait a little bit, to put off facing this terrible definite fact a little longer, now that it had come so near. She had got into a habit of waiting. He ought to be happy: what more could he want her to say? And she wanted to be happy also, to rest and enjoy her happiness, and not to be carried breathless away by his impatient strength of will.

CHAPTER V.

THE FALCON HOTEL.

THE Falcon, at Berne, is a quiet old-fashioned place, very silent and restful, and reached by flights of white stone steps. There are echoes, panels, galleries round an old court, and a kitchen which is raised high above the ground. You can see the cooks' white caps through a gable window, and taste the cooks' good cheer in a panelled dining-room, at the end of a long empty table.

Now and then you hear a piano's distant flourishes, and if you go to the windows you see a sleepy old piazza, and the serious people sauntering by, and your bedroom windows across the street.

Aurelius, who was moodily passing the deserted dining-room, was seized upon by Mr. Bracy, who had come in to order some refreshments. 'Do you dine with us at the *table-d'hôte?*' said the little gentleman, 'there is no one else. My wife finds that absolute quiet is necessary to her. The afflatus is easily startled—easily startled away. I have known Flora lose some of her finest ideas through the inopportune entrance of a waiter or the creaking of a

door. I myself one night thoughtlessly attempted to whistle that chorus out of Faust—(after all who is there like Gounod in these days?)—but the result was distressing in the extreme. I shall never forget watching the subsequent wandering about the room, the vain attempt to recall the interrupted thoughts, the anxious contraction of the brow . . .'

'Do you live in this part of the house?' interrupted Aurelius.

'Come and see our rooms, we are opposite: the ladies are gone up to the top of the house to watch the sunset,' said the friendly little man. 'Charming girl, your friend Miss Marlow; so is Georgina Harrow, a person of rare amiability of disposition. Ah! here is the waiter. At *quelle heure table-d'hôte* to-day?'

Aurelius left Mr. Bracy absorbed and discussing the various merits of private and public refections, and crossed the street, and went in at the arched door opposite, and walked up the stone flights of the opposite house, now darkening with all the shadows of evening. He climbed straight up with steady footsteps to the upper storey; and there through an open door he saw, as he had hoped, some heads crowding together, and looking through an open window at a faint azure sky and all its dying day-lights; Mrs. Bracy was busily pointing out each tint in turn. Jasper was criticising the colours, and comparing them with various bits of blue and red rag which he produced

from his pockets. Miss Harrow was listening to him in admiration.

One person had heard Baxter's footsteps, and Felicia, guessing by some instinct that it was Aurelius, slipped unnoticed out of her corner and turned quietly to meet him, with all the evening's soft radiance shining in her eyes. Her sweet truthful look of welcome touched him and reassured him not a little; he forgot his irritation; for the moment he did not speak, neither did she, he could not waste this happy minute in reproach, and indeed he knew as she did that the whole company would surround them at the first spoken word. As they stood side by side, silent, leaning against the wall, the shadows came deeper, the little room was full of peace, and a sort of tranquillising evening benediction seemed to fall upon their hearts; he could hear her quick gentle breath, though her head was turned away. It was no idle fancy, no vague hope taking shape in his imagination. Felicia was there, and she did not repulse him, and met him with a welcome of her own.

'Why, Colonel Baxter, have you been here all this time?' cries Mrs. Bracy, suddenly wheeling round and facing the two as they stood in the dusky corner.

Felicia came to dinner that day looking prettier than ever, and happier than they had seen her yet, although the young heiress was on the whole a cheerful traveller. At home she might be silent and oppressed; but abroad the change, the different daily colours and words, the new

and altered ways and things all amused her and distracted the somewhat hypochondriacal phantoms which had haunted her lonely house—home it could scarcely be called. Baxter might have been happy too had he so chosen, if he had accepted the good things as they came to him with patience and moderation, and not wished to hurry and to frighten his happiness away. But although that five minutes' unexpressed understanding in the garret had soothed his impatient soul, the constant society of Mr. and Mrs. Bracy, the artistic powers of Mr. Jasper, the cultivated observation of Miss Harrow, all seemed to exasperate his not very easy temper. He was very much in earnest, he felt that his whole happiness was at stake. And to be treated to a few surgarplums when he was asking for daily bread, was not a system calculated to soothe a man of Aurelius's temper. Felicia was kind, gay in her most childish mood, that evening. Jasper, who seemed to be on the most excellent terms with her, kept up an artistic conversation about the poignant painters of the present age, as opposed to the subtle school of philosophic submission, while Mrs. Bracy on the other side asked the Colonel many questions about the Vedas, and the dreamy Orient, and the moral cultivation of the Zenanas.

The only other people at the table were some Germans, one of whom was recounting to the others a colossal walk he contemplated, across his plate of cutlets and brown pota-

toes. The little Scheidegg, the waterfall of Lauterbrunnen, the dizzy height of Mürren, to be reached that same evening. 'It is a colossal expedition,' says the athlete, with a glance at the company. 'Pfui, Pfui!' cry the others, with a sort of admiring whistle.

Mrs. Bracy was preparing to take a parting leave of the Colonel that evening; but as Felicia said good night Baxter held her hand and said quite simply before them all, 'Is this good-bye, Felicia; may I not come to Interlaken with you?'

'Why not,' said Felicia, demurely, 'if you have time to spare; we are going by the early train. They say the lake of Thun is lovely.'

'I am sure Colonel Baxter will prove a delightful and most unexpected addition to our party,' cried Mrs. Bracy, not without asperity. 'Interlaken is a charming place; it is more suited for invalids like myself, who cannot attempt real mountain expeditions, than for *preux chevaliers*, but if your friend will be content, dearest Felicia, to potter with my old husband—forgive me, Edgar—we will escort him to the various pavilions round about the hotel.'

'I have no doubt I shall be well looked after,' said Colonel Baxter, with a somewhat ambiguous gratitude, as he bowed good-night, and walked off with a candle. Felicia's consent had made his heart leap with silent gladness; he no longer minded Mrs. Bracy's jibes. His bedroom was in the same house as the Bracys' apartments.

It was on the ground floor, and the windows opened on a rustling and beshadowed garden, where lilac trees waved upon the starry sky, and striving poplars started ghostlike and dim; close shrouds of ivy veiled the walls. Felicia's window was lighted up; and as Baxter paced the walks smoking his cigar, and watching the smoke mounting straight into the air, he caught her voice from time to time, and the mellifluous accompaniment of Mrs. Bracy's contralto notes; he could not hear their conversation, but a word or two reached him now and then, as he walked along. Presently something made him wince, alone though he was, dark and solitary as the garden might be; he ceased to puff at the cigar, for an instant he listened. 'My money, my money,' Felicia was repeating; 'I know that people think I am rich;' and then the steps Felicia also had been listening to, and which somehow she had identified with Baxter, the steps went away and came no more: and the garden was left quite solitary and dark, with its thick shrubs and silent lilac trees, and strange night-dreams.

'Good night, dear Mrs. Bracy,' says the girl, starting from her seat. 'How shall I thank you for all your kindness to me! Don't be anxious; I am *sure* no one here ever thinks about my fortune, or about anything but being good to me.' But alas! Baxter was not there to hear her.

CHAPTER VI.

EN VOYAGE.

CHIVERS, Felicia's maid, did not call her mistress next morning till a very short time before the omnibus was starting for the station; and Felicia, who had lain awake half the night, jumped up half asleep, and proceeded to dress as quickly as she could. They were only just in time. Mr. Bracy was impatiently stamping on the pavement in an agony of punctuality. Jasper had walked on, they said. His luggage was there—three large bags, red, blue, and yellow, with which he habitually travelled. The intelligent Georgina, calm, brown, composed, was sitting in her corner, looking perfectly unmoved. Mrs. Bracy was also installed, checking over the various umbrellas and parcels. She was evidently ruffled: with poetic natures crossness verges on tragedy, and becomes very alarming at times.

'I'm so sorry,' said Felicia; and she looked vaguely round, and to her surprise, and disappointment too, discovered no sign of Colonel Baxter. 'Where is Colonel Baxter?' she said.

'My dear, how can I tell you?' said Mrs. Bracy, who was in devout hopes that he had been left behind; and Flora stared at Felicia as if in some surprise at her question.

Felicia flushed up; this was not what she had intended. 'Mrs. Bracy, we must go back,' said the young lady very much agitated. 'I promised that he should come with us. What will he think?'

'What is there to prevent Colonel Baxter from coming with us, if he chooses,' said the elder lady with freezing politeness. 'Certainly, if you wish it, I will desire the omnibus to return.'

Felicia was just preparing to say that at all events Chivers should remain with a message, when the object of all this discussion stood up at a street corner to let them pass.

His luggage was also piled on the top of the omnibus, with Jasper's rainbow bags, and he had walked the short distance from the hotel to the railway station.

Felicia, seeing him, was satisfied at once; her sudden energy of opposition passed away; and when they all met at the station she greeted him smiling and composed, gave him her hand and her hand-bag with its many gold and silver flagons.

Baxter could not find a place in the same carriage with Felicia; he climbed up upon the roof, where he sat smoking his cigar, and thinking over a short journey they

had once taken together, six years before. Then it was Fate that had separated them, honour, every feeling of affection and gratitude; now, only the interference of a foolish woman kept them apart. From where he sat he looked down upon Jasper, who stood outside the carriage door upon a sort of platform with a rail; the artist was hatless, he wished his hair to stream upon the wind.

'Take care, Jasper. Come in here,' cries Mrs. Bracy, who had just sent off the Colonel, and declared she must have space for her two fat feet upon the opposite seat, and that there was no room for anyone else in the carriage.

But Jasper said he preferred the rhythm of motion as it thrilled him where he stood.

A pretty little railway runs between the smiling valleys that lead from Berne to Interlaken.

Felicia looked out of the window well pleased by the pleasant sights and aspect of the road.

The railway meets a steamer waiting by a certain smiling green landing-place; and all the passengers issue from the train and go on board, and look over the sides of the boat into deep sweet waters lapping the shore, and calmly flowing in long silver ripples across the lake. On either side the green banks are full and overflowing. White pensions stand in gardens; people come down to the steps to see the steamer pass. Everything tells of peace, of a placid, prosperous comfort.

Baxter found Felicia a place by an American lady who

was pointing out the various scenes of interest with an alpenstock, and the help of a Baedeker, to two young ladies her charges.

'Oh, Miss Cott, is this the page?' enquire her pupils. 'Is this where we have got to? What is the exact distance per rail from Berne to the steamer?'

'Page 47,' says Miss Cott, rapidly turning over the leaves.

The steamer started off; all the people clustering on board flapped their wings, and hummed their song in the sunshine as it streamed above the awning. The Swiss ladies accepted a respectful share of their husbands' conversation; the American ladies, on the contrary, took the lead. There was one stout and helpless personage, covered with rings and many plaits of false hair, to whom Felicia had taken a great dislike, until a little brown-faced girl with earrings ran up and began to kiss the ugly cheeks and to smoothe the woman's tumbled locks.

'Look at that child,' said Felicia; 'how fond she seems to be of the horrid old woman! I am sure I never could tolerate such a mother.'

'And yet you care for *her*,' said Baxter, looking with no friendly glances at Mrs. Bracy advancing to join them. 'Oh, Felicia! won't you tell her that you are going to belong to me, not to her? You must choose between us, you see,' he said with a smile.

'How can you speak so absurdly?' she said, turning away hurt: 'how mistrustful, how unkind you are!'

She did not make allowances for his diffidence, for his boundless admiration, for his natural wish for certainty now that the die was cast. The Colonel, who had less life before him than Felicia, more experience of its chances and disappointments, more intensity of feeling to urge him on, might well be more impatient. He had kept her waiting: did the malicious little creature mean him to feel her power now and to take her wilful vengeance? Her cousin James had spoilt her so utterly that she imagined that all lovers were like James, and would submit to her quick caprices, her sudden flights. Little she knew Aurelius, who now, with black, bent brows, excited, uncompromising, prepared to show her what he felt.

Felicia wanted everybody, not Aurelius only, but others, to be happy and satisfied. It seemed to her to be almost wicked to sacrifice old and tried friends to the fancies of this new comer.

He had played a part in her life, indeed, but it had been a shadowy part hitherto. Suddenly that shadow had become alive: it spoke for itself; it had a bearing which she could no longer sway at her fancy now. She hardly knew what she felt, or what she wanted. Time seemed to her the chief thing that was to explain and harmonise it all, to accustom her to it all. It would be very nice to have him there always, she thought. They might take

walks together, and read books together, and little by little he would learn to appreciate her dear, kind Bracys, and they would learn to know him. Suddenly a thought struck her. Could it be Emily Flower who had influenced him against her friends? It was not like him to be so unkind.

Baxter, meanwhile, who had thought that all was explained and clear between them could not understand these recurring doubts and hesitations. He had made up his mind to come to an issue of some sort; and as he stood behind Felicia's bench he let his fancy drift, as hers had sometimes done—imagined a little scene between them which was to take place in a very few minutes; he was to speak plainly to her; to the woman who had all but promised to be his wife; he meant to tell her how truly he loved her, how unendurable this present state of suspense had suddenly become.

His whole heart went out to her in tenderness and protection. He felt so much and so deeply, surely she would understand him.

The steamer paddled on its way, the hills floated past, the people came on board, and struggled off to shore. . . .

CHAPTER VII.

NO ANSWER.

PRESENTLY, a special peaceful hour of sun and calm content seemed to fall on the travellers: the talk became silenced, the waters deepened, the banks shone more green. Aurelius, looking up, saw that his enemy had allowed herself to be overcome by the stillness, by the tranquil rocking of the boat. She was leaning her head on Miss Harrow's shoulder. Mr. Bracy was at the other end of the boat, claiming acquaintance with a bench full of English people. Jasper was drowsily balancing himself against the bulwark, with both arms widely extended. A swan came sailing out from shore; and then Aurelius began his sentence, and in plain words, not without feeling and honest diffidence, he spoke in a low voice, of which Felicia heard every syllable.

'I have been thinking that I perhaps took you by surprise yesterday,' he said. 'If it is so, you must just tell me; you needn't be afraid of giving me pain. Anything is better than want of confidence; but this state of things

is really more than I can bear. You know that my heart is yours, and has been yours only for all these years. Now whatever your answer may be, I will abide by it.'

Felicia was touched; but she was silent, tapping her foot against the wooden deck.

'If I ad come long ago, perhaps I might have had more chance,' Aurelius went on, frightened by her silence. 'Perhaps you think me presumptuous. Some one in whom I trust encouraged me to come.'

'Emily Flower, I suppose, told you to come,' said Felicia.

'Yes,' stupid Aurelius answered, slowly. 'She told me to come.'

Felicia looked away; she did not care to meet his honest eyes. So he had not come of *himself*, but only because his cousin had sent him; only come because he thought she expected it of him. Her cheek burned with indignant fire.

The little heiress was an autocrat in her way—in that gentle, vehement, kind-hearted way of hers. She was an unreasonable autocrat as she sat there motionless, with her head turned away; her eyes flashed angrily, but then tears came to put out the fire. Was no one to be trusted? Did not even Aurelius love her enough to come straight home to her? He too, must needs consult, and hesitate, and calculate. James would not have left her all this long time. The steamer paddled on while the two waited in

their many voiced silence, but when at last Felicia looked up, the glance that met her own was so sad that she had not the heart to speak the jealous words that had been upon her lips, the crimson died out of her cheeks, her eyes softened. Aurelius took it all so humbly with a sudden hopelessness that surprised Miss Marlow, who, as I have said, for all her innocent vanities and whimsicalities, did not realise in what estimation Baxter held her. Something touched her. Suddenly her face changed to the old kind face again, she put out her little hand with its soft grey glove.

'We must have our talk another day,' she said; 'to-morrow, not now. This is not the time.'

'No, indeed,' said Aurelius, not without emphasis; for as he spoke Mrs. Bracy was awakening with a wild start and an appealing smile to the company such as reviving sleepers are apt to give. In a minute more she had joined Felicia. Baxter walked away to where Jasper, at his end of the boat, had shifted his spread eagle attitude into one of skewer-like rigidity; while little Mr. Bracy came trotting up panting and bubbling over with information: 'The Alpes, the Alpes,' says he; 'I'm told that is the place to go to, Flora; good *table d'hôte*, a magnificent view; the divine for you my love, for us the creature comforts. That family you see sitting near the wheel are going there; the gentleman strongly recommends the place—a very pleasant, well-informed person: he was on board the

steamer we crossed in to Calais. I think you would like him, but of course one can't be sure.'

'Edgar,' said his wife emphatically, 'make what acquaintances you like, but *pray* do not introduce them to me. Our party is much too large as it is. It was a mistake bringing Georgina,' she added, as Felicia looked up at her with a quick glance.

'You did it out of kindness, my love. The poor girl is thoroughly enjoying herself,' cries the little man, anxiously.

Then all the little bustlings and distractions of the road come to divert everybody's mind from personalities.

The travellers by water were turned into passengers by steam, and then again into wretched fares, wedged side by side in a red velvet omnibus. Jasper had more than enough to do grappling with his parti-coloured bags. Aurelius shouldered his own small portmanteau and Felicia's dressing-case, leaving Mr. Bracy, with the help of the amiable Miss Harrow, to collect the many possessions of his Flora—her writing book (carried loose with her pen and her inkstand), her cushions and sunshades, her luncheon in its basket.

Mrs. Bracy's poet nature invariably required a luncheon basket, the one arm-chair, the most comfortable bedroom, the wing of the chicken, the shady corner in the garden.

The spirit being imprisoned in mortal coil, Flora

was wont to say it required absolute freedom from mere temporary discomfort, in order to have full scope to soar.

'So I have observed,' says Baxter, drily, making room for himself among Mrs. Bracy's parasols.

'Ah!' Mrs. Bracy answers, dimly dissatisfied; 'you notice everything. I hope my foot-rest is not in your way.'

'For comfort,' says Jasper, joining in from the opposite corner of the omnibus, and with a glance at the other passengers, 'give me cats to stroke. I thought of bringing a couple abroad, but my uncle dissuaded me.'

'Cats!' says Baxter, eyeing Jasper as if he was a maniac.

But here the omnibus stops at the doors of the hotel; the porters, waiters, majordomos, rush forward breathless, to grip the elbows of the descending travellers.

CHAPTER VIII.

BY A FOUNTAIN.

It is very hot and sultry in the hotel garden. The fountain and the piano from the saloon are playing a duet. The fountain itself must be boiling after the morning's glare, but the sound of the water is not the less delightful to parched ears. An old man sits on a bench by a charming and handsome young woman; a grandchild is playing at his feet. The old man's is a world-known name; he has swayed nations and armies in his life, but he is quietly stirring his coffee in the shadow of the chestnut tree. Presently, obsequiosity in thread gloves, with a newspaper in its hand, comes up, bows low, and takes a respectful chair at the old diplomat's invitation. Felicia is sitting in a little arbour close by, leaning back half asleep, and swinging her little feet. She has taken off her felt hat, and pushed back the two plaits that usually make a sort of coronet about her pretty head. The diamond ornament at her throat glistens like the radiating lights of the fountain; the folds of her China silk dress shine

with tints that come and go. She is in a peaceful, expectant state of mind, drowsy, prepared for happiness to come to her; it is much too sultry weather to go in search of it. 'How can Georgina go on practising as she does through the heat of the day?' Meanwhile, Miss Harrow, the musician, leaves off for an instant, looks up at the approach of Colonel Baxter, or answers when he asks her whether she has seen Miss Marlow, 'Yes, Colonel Baxter, you will find her by the fountain;' and then she begins again with fresh spirit, and some vague and reanimating sense of an audience. The dry knobbly fingers rattle on, her bony head nods in time, her skinny kid feet beat upon the pedal with careful attention. It would be difficult to say of what use Georgina's monotonous music is to herself, or to art, or to the world in general; but she does her best, while Felicia by the fountain shrugs her pretty shoulders. Miss Marlow is still sleepily watching the old diplomat and his coffee-pot under the tree, and then her soft, heavy eyes travel on to the end of the terrace, where she can see the line of the mountains. Everything to-day is sleepy, and heaped with shadows and tranquil languor. The blue is kindling beyond the line of crests, the lovely azure flows from peak to peak, from pass and glacier to rocky summit; the sky seems to catch fire as Felicia looks, and a white *something* leaps to meet it. The bushes about are all in flower; a whole parterre of olive-green and starry constellations is scent-

ing the air. How hot, how still it is! how straight the paths look, just crossed here and there by some faint shadow! One's life seems passed, Fay thinks, in straggling from shadow into sunshine, and from sunshine into shadow again. Outside the low wall the people go passing—the prim young German ladies with their tight waists, slightly lame from their clumsy high heels; the little fat Englishman, conscious of his puggaree; the Swiss family, in drab, with hand-bags to match, each shaded by a dome of grey calico. Then Felicia vacantly stares at a shining ball of glass stuck upon a stick, growing in front of the hotel, and which reflects the sun and the human beings coming and going upon the face of the earth, in strangest curves and contortions; and while she is still looking—the figures issue from the ball, they turn into well-known faces and forms; one sits down beside her on the bench, another holds out with both hands a china plate, which breaks into a star. Felicia's little head falls gently back upon a branch of myrtle. She is asleep, and peacefully slumbering in the valley of ease, with a sweet childish face, breathing softly; and Aurelius, black and determined, who has come to reproach her, to insist upon an explanation, stands watching her slumbers for a moment. As he watches his face softens and melts, and then he walks away very quietly.

When Felicia awoke with a start about an hour later, she found a soft knitted shawl thrown over her. Baxter

did not appear again till dinner time, and during dinner he said nothing particular, looked nothing remarkable. He sat next Felicia, attended to her wants, and talked very pleasantly in the intervals.

The Bracys were bent upon enjoying the various pleasures of the place; and Mr. Bracy, having learned from the head waiter next day that a band played in the gardens of the establishment from four to five, urged his ladies to attend the entertainment. They consented somewhat lazily, for, as I have said, the weather was hot, and exertion seemed unwelcome, but once they were there it was pleasant enough—a little breeze came rustling over their heads; the company sat chattering, turning over newspapers, eating ices; the tunes were dinning gaily and delightfully, for the music was led by a well-known and popular conductor, Francis Arupan by name; cigars were puffing; friends were greeting. Felicia was sitting between Mr. Bracy and Miss Harrow, under the shade of an awning, Mrs. Bracy was taking a turn on Jasper's indigo arm, when Mr. Bracy suddenly started up to greet some of his numerous steam-boat acquaintances, and at the same minute somebody came striding over a low iron fence at the back of Felicia's chair, and sat down beside her, in Mr. Bracy's vacant place. I need not say that this was Baxter, who had chosen his time.

'We can have our talk now, Felicia. You gave me no chance last night. Miss Harrow, would you kindly leave

us for a few minutes?' (Georgina instantly vanished in discreet alarm, notwithstanding Felicia's imploring glances), and then Baxter went on very quietly, but with increasing emphasis: 'You *must* face the truth, Felicia; you must give me my answer. Ask no one else to advise you—tell me what you wish from yourself! This much I have a right to ask. I have kept out of your way all to-day on purpose; now you must let me speak plainly. All night long I lay awake wondering what you would decide. I know,' he added, 'that as far as the world goes I am about as bad a match as you could make, but I don't think anyone could ever love you better.'

She heard his voice break a little as he spoke, and then he waited for the last time in renewed emotion for the answer that was to decide both their fates. He was really not asking too much. As he said, he had a right to an answer. Was it some evil demon that prompted Felicia? She meant to spare him, as she thought, to gain time for herself.

'Why are you always thinking of my money?' she said. 'Mrs. Bracy tells me it can all be tied up if I marry, it need not concern you.'

Her words somehow jarred upon Baxter; indeed, they jarred upon Felicia herself, as she spoke them. He was over-wrought, perhaps unreasonable, in his excitement.

'It is you and Mrs. Bracy, not I, who are always thinking about money,' he cried. 'If you can suspect me of such

unworthy motives, you are not the woman I took you for. Felicia, trust me—make no conditions——'

She laid her hand upon his arm to quiet him, but he went on all the more vehemently. 'You let their flatteries poison your true self. I will agree to none of their bargains. If you love me, marry me with your heart and with all that you have. If you do not care for me, send me away, and I will certainly trouble you no longer. Oh, Felicia! you should not use me so.'

He spoke in a voice which frightened her, with a sort of reproachful despotism that startled and terrified Miss Marlow far more than he had any idea of. When she answered, it was to a sudden scraping of fiddles, to which she unconsciously raised her tones.

'I cannot see what you have to complain of,' she said, trembling. 'If you insist upon only marrying me with my money, I certainly cannot agree to the bargain. As I told Mrs. Bracy, I do not grudge you the money; if you wanted some you know I would give you some. You——'

'Felicia!' He started up, and spoke in a cold rasping voice. 'You need not have insulted me. You are ruined by your miserable fortune. My truths don't suit you—their lies please you better. Good-bye; be happy your own way with the companions you prefer. You have given me my answer.'

'Colonel Baxter!' cried Felicia, starting up too, as he

turned. 'Dont go, you know you promised to come with us to-morrow.'

Aurelius looked her hard in the face, with his dark reproachful angry eyes. 'I could only have come in one way,' he said; 'that is over for ever.'

'For—for ever,' Felicia faltered, dropping back into her chair again, for he was gone. The musicians had ended, the whole place seemed suddenly empty and astir, a crowd seemed to surround her, she thought once that Baxter had returned, but it was only Jasper standing beside her. 'I came back to look for you,' said he. 'Aunt Flora is gone to the hotel. What is this?' and he suddenly stooped and picked up a dirty little bit of yellow rag that was hanging to one of the railings. 'See what quality! What exquisite modulations of tone!' cries Jasper, holding his prize up in the air.

'Exquisite,' said Felicia, mechanically—she knew not to what, nor did she look at the precious rag. At the first opportunity she escaped from him, and ran upstairs and along the passage that led to her own room. Once there, she locked the door, still in a sort of maze. She sat stupidly upon the red velvet sofa, staring through the window at the great white Jungfrau, which seemed to stare back at her. What had she done? Had she been mad or only over wise? There are passes in life where it is scarcely possible to realise very clearly the names of the various impulses by which we are driven. Every moment

brings a fresh impression. a fresh aspect of things. Each impression is true but partial, each aspect is sincere but incomplete. Perhaps at such times the only clue is the dim sense of a whole to be completed, the craving for more time, for distance that defines and cancels the less important facts, and reveals the truth. Felicia had followed her impulse and let Aurelius go, though in her heart she would fain have called him back to her again. Baxter had set the estimation of others beyond his own conviction. Instead of thinking only of Felicia, he had thought of his shortcomings; and she, instead of thinking of Baxter, had talked about him to Flora Bracy. It had all been so short that she could scarcely realise it. If her happiness had been vague, her unhappiness was still more intangible. What had these two days brought about? A possibility. Aurelius had reproached her, she had answered angrily; but it was all over. 'For ever,' he had said. She sat there till the loud dinner-bell began to din through the house, and raps at the door reminded her that Chivers was outside, the others were waiting. Could she bear to tell them? She shrank from their comments. She felt that it would be best to try and behave as if nothing had happened. She bathed her aching head, let Chivers smooth her hair, and then hurried down stairs.

CHAPTER IX.

TABLE D'HÔTE.

All the doors were opening and the tenants coming out of their rooms, with various appetites and attempts at adornment. Mrs. Bracy was arrayed in her most gorgeous hues, with an Indian scarf wound about her ample shoulders; but even Mrs. Bracy's colours faded before some of the amazing rainbows that appeared balanced on their high heels, puffed, frizzed, stuffed out with horse-hair, tied in by strings, and dabbed with red and yellow, as, male and female, they descended the great staircase and took their places at the long table. Felicia's place was, as usual, by Jasper and Mrs. Bracy. Miss Harrow sat opposite with Mr. Bracy. The day before Baxter had been at Felicia's right hand, and all dinner time they had chatted comfortably together. To-day she looked round at his empty place; it was filled by a well-worn foreign edition of Miss Harrow, a little haggard woman, with an anxious glance and appetite, who seemed to eat not because she was hungry, but because she had paid for her dinner, and was determined to have her

money s worth. She looked at Miss Marlow once or twice. 'They will give you ice if you demand them,' she said, in tolerable English, to Felicia; 'and you have a right to a wing of the chick. Some people have left since yesterday; you have been moved up by Mr. Franz. You are not such a large party as you were. I am all alone! yes, I am always travelling alone. Where is that gentleman who was travelling with you yesterday?'

Felicia felt her cheeks blush up suddenly, and then she blushed again with vexation.

'Interlaken is a dull place for gentlemen who can valk. Ah! here comes the salad,' said the little woman, who saw it all, but pretended to be looking at her plate. 'Do not pass it over. Mr. Franz makes such good salad. I tell the lady what good salad you make,' said she to the head waiter; and then the little ghost-like woman began to devour the green lettuce, in a curious hurried way, as if she feared that her food might be taken away from her. 'It is sad to be all alone in places like these,' she went on, with a quick look at Felicia. 'I make friends, but people go away, and it is all to begin again;' and she flirted out a great green fan, and began to whisk it backwards and forwards.

The great hall grew hotter and hotter, the voices seemed to rise, the clatter to increase, the waiters were flying about, a moraine of smoking dishes, of plates, and scraps of comestibles seemed hurled by some invisible

means across the great counter at the far end of the room. Felicia's spirits sank lower and lower. All alone! Something in the woman's voice seemed to rouse a dismal echo in her own mind; the sight of that thin nervous hand, flickering, darting at the salt, flying at the dishes, in the place of Aurelius's tranquil neighbourhood, seemed to play upon every nerve. Where was he? What was he thinking? Would that poor woman never keep quiet? She had a longing to seize the skinny hand and tie it down. If Felicia disliked her unknown companion's eager movements, the firm grasp of Mrs. Bracy's fat familiar fingers was almost as trying.

'Do not talk so much to that horrid woman,' said the poetess. 'She wants to join on to our party. I will not have her impose upon us.'

'Hush—she will hear you,' says Felicia; for she saw the little bat-like lady's eyes fixed upon Mrs. Bracy's lips.

'My dear child, these people have no conscience,' said Flora, crossly. 'Edgar,' bending forward, 'what do you say?'

'We shall have Fine Weather for our Expedition Tomorrow!' shouts Mr. Bracy, across the table. 'This gentleman,' pointing to a very red face and a flannel shirt, 'has come just from Mürren, by the Scheideck. He tells me the mountains are looking remarkably fine just now. Who knows what inspirations, eh, Flora, my love?' and Mr. Bracy suddenly began something confidentially in an

undertone to his new-found friend, and Felicia could tell from the expression of the little man's eyebrows that he was speaking of the Poems. Then her thoughts travelled away from the clatter of the present to the mountains of to-morrow. She impatiently longed to get to them, to breathe their silent pure air, to escape this stifling valley, which had suddenly lost all interest for her, all vitality. Her heart sank, and sank into some depth, where pain began and no happiness could reach. What was Jasper saying? did she feel faint? would she come out? A sort of mist fell between her and her neighbours.

'Take my fan,' says the strange lady.

Mrs. Bracy looked at her young companion, and thought of proposing to leave the table with her, but the ices were coming round at that moment; they looked so refreshing in their pink pyramids that, on second thoughts, she helped herself largely. 'This will do you good, dear Felicia,' she said; but Felicia jumped up quickly, and escaped through a door which happened to be behind her chair. They found her sitting quietly on the balcony outside their sitting-room, when they rejoined her. She looked very pale; she was watching the floating snow-range in its evening dream of light and silver and faint azalea tints. Others had come out to see the wonders of that sunset.

The tongues of fire fell that night upon the company

assembled in the garden of the Hôtel des Alpes at Interlaken—Parthians, with many glances and chignons; clergymen and Jews and infidels taking their hard-earned holidays together; the light fell upon them all, and they all spoke in words of wondering praise.

The very children seemed impressed. The fire leapt from snow to snow, dazzling in tender might. The mountain seemed to put out great wings, to tremble with a mysterious life; the snow-fields hung mid-air, the radiance of their summits seemed to spread into space. People came out from the long tables where they had been dining, streaming out into the garden where the miracle was to be seen. Voices changed, people changed; for a few moments one impulse seemed to touch all these human beings, calling them to something most mysterious and beyond them, utterly beyond expression or remembrance. Such a mood coming from without, imposed by inanimate things upon the living, seems to be like some ancient history of revelation realised once again. The faces shone as they turned towards the mountains all burning in their light.

Upon a balcony of the hotel our Poetess had appeared shrouded in a long gauze veil. She stood, tablets in hand, and pausing for inspiration. Mrs. Bracy hated people to talk when she was taking notes. She desired some one, who exclaimed in the room within, to be silent now, and presently her own voice was the only one to be

heard, upraised in shrill approbation of the solemn beauty of the evening.

One or two people had left the garden and the crowd, and crossed the road and sat quietly upon the low parapet opposite, watching. The Swiss women, who seemed hired at so much a day to walk slowly up and down the avenue, in starched sleeves, with go-carts, ceased to drag for a moment and stopped to look. So did the sentimental German ladies with their hand bags, and the eager English tourists, and the Swiss students in spectacles, with their arms full of books, and the Russian and American travellers in their well-fitting clothes.

The glory passed on by degrees; an awful shadow rose from the valley and mounted upward, rapid, remorseless. The beautiful flames of a moment sank away; the pinnacles still dominated with their fiery points—an instant more and all was over in that wonder-world, and the oil-lamps resumed the reign upon earth.

The old diplomat on his terrace went back to his evening paper; two young girls at a window clasped each other's hands in youthful enthusiasm. 'O Sophy!' said one of them. 'O Fina!' said the other; and meanwhile the lady in the balcony continued her remarks.

'Did you not observe the marvellous effect of that last, last tint, succumbing as it were to the great——'

'It is a passion of atmospheric word-painting,' interrupted Jasper, who had been hastily making a sketch with some yellow ochre and carmine.

There was a sudden burst of voices from the garden below. 'Sugar, absolutely like sugar!' cried a young Russian lady to her partner of the night before.

'Sugar!' exclaims Mrs. Bracy in a sepulchral voice, 'do they liken that noble mass to sugar—that livid, living, loving——'

'My dear Flora, do see after Miss Marlow!' said little Mr. Bracy, anxiously.

'It is nothing, nothing,' Felicia whispers, trying in vain to hush her sobs. Suddenly the poor little thing had burst into tears, and all the gold stoppers out of her travelling-bag were produced in vain to soothe her troubles. Some remembrance of the night before had come over her, some sudden realisation of her lonely state, and yet Baxter was only ten miles off, toiling up the mountain road to Grindelwald, as it lies on the mountain side, at the foot of the Eiger, and of the great Wetterhorn, with its crown of floating mist.

It had been so sudden, she could scarcely believe in it. Baxter was gone—no one but herself seemed to miss him. Why was he not there to see the beautiful sunset? If her brief happiness had been vague, her present unhappiness seemed still more intangible. Aurelius had been unkind, unreasonable; she had answered unkindly—that was all, and everything was changed somehow, and why was she so miserable—so utterly miserable?

Mrs. Bracy may have had her suspicions, but she bided

her time, and kept her words to herself. Felicia was petted, sent to bed, to all sorts of vague agitated dreams of parting and desolate places, to dreary startings and remorseful awakenings, as the night sped on with stars without, to the murmurs, and muffled cries from the valley.

And then, after the long night came morning, as it comes, with a sort of surprise; day breaking once more after the darkness of many hours; the sweet irresistible light reaching everywhere—into every corner—spreading across the valleys as they lie dimly in their dreams. It starts along the mountain side, the shadows melt, disperse. Crisp ridges come into streaming relief; then the snow fields are gained, and lo! mysterious, simultaneous, behold the lights break forth on every side, and the dazzling white Jungfrau floats dominant once more.

CHAPTER X.

AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE.

THEY set off for Grindelwald next day in two quick trotting carriages. The horses were hung with cheerful little bells, and seemed well able to face the steep pass. 'How delicious!' cried Felicia, as the wheels of her einspanner rolled across the resounding boards of a wooden bridge. The young lady leant forward eagerly, and the cool breeze from the torrent came blowing into her blushing face. She looked down with bright-eyed wonder at the foaming water rushing underneath.

'Look! mem,' said Chivers; 'what a picture!' And so it was, for the snow-capped mountain-heads uprose at the turn of the winding road; the grey river was eddying on its way, and the charcoal-burners had lit a fire that flamed down among the boulders by the running stream.

It was almost evening when they reached their journey's end; coming up through the village street, with its busy little shops lighting up, and the friendly clusters of peasant folk gossiping after their day's work. The great mountains actually overhung the little village; huge rocks reared

their mighty sides, all lined and seamed with the intricate network of delicate shadow; the pale white crests clustered beyond the rocks. Felicia was almost overpowered by the pomp and stately splendour of this mighty Court, to which she was not yet accustomed. She could hardly tear herself away from the terrace in front of the windows.

'Dinner, ladies, dinner!' cried Mr. Bracy, calling from the dining-room of the hotel. As they came in, he made them take their places, talking as usual, while he saw to everybody's requirements. He had just seen their friend Colonel Baxter's name in the book. 'He slept here last night, and has gone on to the upper glacier,' says Mr. Bracy, sharpening his knife.

Jasper had also seen the Colonel's departure, not without satisfaction. He had been cross-questioning Georgina in the einspanner coming up.

'There was something,' Georgina owned confidentially. 'They had a long, long conversation. I think she is angry.'

'She wants a protector,' said Jasper thoughtfully, twirling the silver ring upon his first finger.

I think the same evil imp which so maliciously prompted Felicia now involved the unfortunate painter in his toils, and began to whisper to him that Aurelius being gone, Jasper's own hour had come. It was for him to make Felicia forget the faithless Colonel. No one knew for certain what had happened; only that Felicia was changed

and preoccupied was evident to them all. Jasper ate his dinner as usual, but ostentatiously drank a great deal of wine. He began to turn sentimental; from sentimental art to artistic sentiment the step is but short.

The next day was Sunday. The bell of the village church had been going for an hour before Felicia arose; as she dressed she had peeped out of her window at the figures passing up the street, quiet and collected, in their smart Sunday coiffes and beavers. As for the English, they also put on their best bonnets, although the clouds hung low and the weather was threatening, and assembled in the dining-room of the hotel, where in those days the English service was held once a week. The tables were rolled out of the way, the plates were put inside the wooden dresser, the chairs were set out in three rows, the blinds drawn half way down, and a few straggling travellers came into the room, where the usual traffic was for a time suspended.

But it was impossible not to feel the incongruity of the form in which much had been expressed, that seemed almost incompatible with the associations of the place and its appurtenances. As the congregation left the room, the waiters began clattering their knives and forks, and spreading the dinner tables once more; and Felicia walked away, glad to escape up the village street towards the little churchyard, across which came the strain of a hymn sung by many voices.

Felicia went to the door and looked into the quiet old building, where she saw a great number of the villagers assembled, each in their places. The brown-coated men were on one side, and the women were sitting in rows along the other aisle; the old ones in their coiffes, the young ones with their pretty brown braids tied with velvet, displaying clean white sleeves and black bodices. The preacher was ascending his pulpit. It was all very quiet and decorous. The very bareness of the old church seemed to be more impressive than any tawdry ornament. She listened, but she could scarcely follow the German of the preacher, and so she walked on a little way, turning one thing and another over in her mind. She came presently to a narrow bridge across a stream, and she stood looking thoughtfully down at the rushing water. Where was she travelling to? Among what past and present things was she living? She started, hearing a step. No; it was only Jasper in his indigo suit.

It was Jasper, who came up to her, and suddenly, to Felicia's dismay, began a long and desultory speech in which figured gem-like flames of twin lives, rosy raptures of love-greeting, and double stars encircling their own progression. Miss Marlow might not have understood a word he said, or that he intended this as a serious proposal, had not the unlucky youth seized her by the hand and suddenly attempted to thrust the large silver ring which he usually wore on to her finger. Felicia fairly lost her temper, and

snatched her hand away. The ring flashed into the stream. What! she had parted from the only man she had ever cared for in order to be insulted by this absurd and ridiculous mockery! It seemed like a judgment upon her, a mockery of fate. 'The companions you have chosen!' she seemed to hear Aurelius's voice saying. What would he say if he were there now? She seemed to see the reproachful look of his eyes there before her.

'How dare you ask me to marry you?' she cried to poor astonished Jasper, 'when you know you do not care for me one bit? Do you know I might have married someone who has loved me for years if I had not been ill advised, if I had not been a fool and thrown away my best chance? And do you suppose I should think of marrying you,' cried Felicia, 'who do not care for me, and for whom I do not care?' and she turned and began hurrying back through a shower of rain towards the hotel. Jasper must have been possessed; he followed her step by step, protesting in the language of a troubadour rather than that of a reasonable being. They had reached the churchyard by this time. 'Do leave me,' cried Felicia, stopping short. 'Don't you see I want you to go?' and as she spoke she stamped her foot in a fit of most unladylike passion, then as suddenly burst into tears. The good old preacher's voice had been droning on peaceably all this while inside the church, and Felicia's explanations might have been continued even more fully if the sermon had not suddenly come to an end

and the congregation issued forth, opening its umbrellas, walking off with short sturdy legs, tucking up its ample petticoats and trousers. The men, in their brown coats and clumsy boots, looked like good-natured bears trotting down the wet road; the women, with their kind faces, and quaint lace snoods, were like figures out of some long-forgotten dream. They passed on, quietly streaming down the street; some took to the fields, but more of them were going straight from the service to their Sunday gathering at the tavern by the bridge. Disconcerted Jasper marched off with the crowd, leaving Felicia to get home as best she could. She found him, however, waiting for her at the entrance of the hotel.

'I'm afraid I carried off the umbrella,' he said with an uneasy laugh. 'I've waited to tell you that—er,' here he looked very red and foolish, 'you quite misunderstood me, Miss Marlow. You didn't do me justice, indeed you didn't. This shall make no difference on my part, and I hope you will keep a fellow's confidence sacred.'

'I have certainly no wish to repeat what has happened,' said Felicia, still unrelenting.

'I shall start early to-morrow,' said Jasper, irritated. 'After a day alone in the mountains I shall know how to master my feelings. Perhaps if I meet Colonel Baxter,' he added, 'you would like me to send him down.'

This was said with a mixture of feminine spite and masculine jealousy. He felt he had revenged himself on

Miss Marlow. Felicia did not answer; she looked Jasper full in the face, and swept past him haughtily to her own room. Poor Felicia! she began to find her circumstances somewhat trying. Mrs. Bracy was especially snappish that evening; Georgina looked tearful and reproachful. Miss Marlow wondered whether Jasper had kept his own sacred confidence. It was quite a relief when kind little Mr. Bracy bustled in with a guide and a programme for the following day.

'What do you say to seeing something of the environs? We might all start off to meet our artist to-morrow on his return? We can lunch at the châlet at the entrance to the upper glacier—excellent cookery, I am told; fine view of the mountains. Suit you? eh, Flora, my love?'

Flora answered severely that she certainly should not go, she needed repose. Then she added, with intention: 'Probably Felicia would also wish to remain behind?'

Nothing was farther from Felicia's wish. She merely said she would like to see the upper glacier. Three mules were accordingly ordered, with three guides to match. The mules were in the stables, the guides were in the kitchen drinking beer.

CHAPTER XI.

CLIMBING UP.

THEY were all somewhat late in their start next morning. At last they got off, the ladies in their improvised skirts, Mr. Bracy trotting faithfully by their side in knickerbockers, and with an ice-axe which he had borrowed, but which he found some difficulty in managing. After passing the church and the village, and crossing the stream of provoking associations, the way led up a narrow ledge cut along the side of the rock. The path rose abruptly, and the great plain seemed to sink away at their feet. The mules stumbled on steadily; and, after some half-hour's arid climb, the path, with a sudden turn, led into a burst of gentle green and shade and sweetness. Mosses overflowed the huge granite stones; streams rippled; the flowers which were over down below still starred white among the rocks; ferns started from the cracks in the huge fallen masses; the path wound and straggled on across meadows into woods of fragrant pine, flowing green and flowering light, until at last the travellers reached a wide green alp, covered with herds of browsing cattle, open to the clouds, and clothed with exquisite verdure and silence.

There is a little erection built at the summit of the great alp for travellers to rest, and to eat wild strawberries if they will, provided by the villagers, while they admire the noble prospect. Felicia dismounted here, and went on a little way a-head into a wood of mountain ash and birch and chestnut. It seemed enchanted to her; so were the tree stems, and so was the emerald turf, still sparkling with the heavy morning dew. Every leaf seemed quivering with life. This sweet abundance lay on every side, tender little stems, bearing their burden of seed or flower; leaves veined and gilt and bronzed. The eye-bright, with its gentle velvet marks, sparkled among the roots of the trees; moneywort flung its golden flowers; grass of parnassus lit its silver stars. Everything was delicate and tender in fragrant beauty. A little higher up Felicia could see the crimson berries, growing among grey stones and hairy mosses and pine roots. The leaves were like gold, the fruit glowing like rubies. A little peasant girl was climbing down the bank with a bunch of late wood strawberries. The child's little fingers seemed the only ones that should pluck such fairy work. Felicia took the bunch of crimson fruit, and gave the little girl not money but a little chain of beads she happened to wear on her wrist. The child clapped her hands and ran away as hard as her little legs could carry her. Then came the mules and the guides, climbing up the road from the châlet, and the cavalcade set forth once more.

High up at the end of a long winding mountain pass stands a little châlet, where cutlets are grilling, guides sit sipping their wine and cracking their jokes in the kitchen. The parlour, with its wooden walls, wooden tables and benches, is filled by caravans of travellers; some are on their way to the glacier, others are returning home; everybody is more or less excited, exhausted, hungry, discursive. The wooden hut echoes with voices, with the clatter of steel upon earthenware. Sometimes as the kitchen door swings upon its hinges, the guides begin a sort of jodelling chorus; sometimes an impatient horse strikes up a snorting and pawing on the platform outside. From the terrace itself you may look across a great icy abyss to the mountains rising silent and supreme; but the châlet is a little commonplace noisy human oasis, hanging among the great natural solemnities all about, mighty rocks striking their shadows age after age, deserted seas that seem to have been frozen as they tossed their unquiet waves in vast curves against the summer sky; a wide valley blinked at by our wondering eyes, as we try to name this or that glittering point. Someone fires off an old blunderbuss, and the echo bangs down among the rocky clefts, striking and reverberating; and then perhaps the host comes out courteously to announce that our portion of bread and cheese is served, and hungry travellers forget echoes, fatigue, and wonder in the absorbing process of luncheon. The German party were

enjoying potato soup, and shouting over their dish as the ladies entered.

'Here is our table,' says Mr. Bracy. 'Kalbflesh, hey! I hope you ladies are not tired of veal cutlets.' Then, lowering his voice, 'Our friend from Berne. I knew him at once—very much altered, poor man—sadly burnt by the sun. Has been through a great deal of fatigue since we last saw him.'

Felicia looked, and could scarcely recognise their fellow-traveller, so scorched and seamed, so ripped and hacked was he. His lips were swelled, his eyes were crimson, his wild tumbled hair hung limp about his face, his neat tight-fitting clothes were torn and soiled, and burst out at knees and elbows; his enamelled shirt-collar alone remained intact, except that a glittering crack in one place showed the steel; a more forlorn object it would be difficult to imagine. He himself, however, seemed well satisfied with his appearance, and with adventures, even more colossal than he had hoped for. He had lost his way up among the rocks the evening before, having scrambled up to see the sunset. Then came the darkness. He had been able to descend only by the most desperate heroism.

'He was a madman to put himself into such a situation,' said the host, confidentially, to Miss Marlow, as he dusted her plate and wiped a glass which he set before her. 'I discovered him by chance; half an hour later, it

would have been too late—we could have done nothing. I sent our man off to help him across the glacier. The Herr saw him coming, and called out, "Have you food?" Peter, our man, said, "Yes; I have veal you can eat, and gain strength to return." He came back quite exhausted, and has been drinking all day to refresh himself. Travellers should not go into such places without guides; they get themselves into trouble, and we are blamed. Only this morning two gentlemen set out alone; one had spent the night here, an English colonel. The other arrived from Grindelwald. I said to him, "Take Peter to show you the way to the upper glacier." Not he. But it is not safe.'

'Which way did they go?' said Felicia, putting down her knife and fork, and looking up into the host's weather-beaten face.

'How can I tell?' said he, 'or where they may be now!'

'It couldn't be Jasper,' said Mr. Bracy, rather anxiously: 'he wouldn't have done anything rash. Just ask the man what sort of traveller it was, my dear.'

'One was black and somewhat silent,' said the host; 'military bear-like.'

'That couldn't have been Jasper,' said Mr. Bracy, relieved.

'And the other?' said Miss Harrow.

'The second,' said the man doubtfully, 'he was

strangely dressed; he wore a feather, and seemed somewhat out of the common, an actor, perhaps, with large ears, like Peter's yonder.'

Felicia hoped that Mr. Bracy did not understand, and hastily asked whether they had not written their names in the travellers' book; and sure enough, there upon the long page were the two signatures, Jasper's curling J's and Baxter's close writing. 'Jasper is sure to be back,' said Mr. Bracy, slightly disquieted still; 'he is very careful about keeping people waiting, his aunt has taught him punctuality. He has gone sketching somewhere, or forgotten the time. Of course I don't know anything about the Colonel. Very odd of him, wasn't it, to leave us as he did without a word?'

'Very odd,' said Felicia, faltering a little. They sat over luncheon as long as they could, and then ordered up coffee to pass the time; and then Felicia left the other two, and went in front and stood gazing at the great hopeless wall of mountains.

'You don't mind waiting a little for him?' said little Mr. Bracy, fussing up presently. 'It is getting rather late, but I'm afraid my wife might be anxious if we went back without the boy. There's a nice bench this way and an excellent telescope, one of Casella's, if you wish to look through; excellent maker, you know.' Felicia eagerly accepted Mr. Bracy's suggestion. Was it some faint hope that Baxter might return? Was it anxiety

for Jasper that made her so reluctant to leave the place? Not long after Mr. Bracy disappeared, again to reappear in excellent spirits. A party had just arrived—two American gentlemen and their guide. They brought news of Jasper. They had passed an artist sketching in the crevasses under an umbrella, not very far off, at the entrance of the glacier.

'It must have been Jasper,' says Mr. Bracy: 'poor dear fellow, how hard he works! I must say I wish he would come down. I have a great mind to go a little way to look for him, if you two girls don't mind being left.' Felicia assured Mr. Bracy that she had no objection whatever to being left, and in truth she drew a great breath of relief when she found herself at last alone. But it was only for a minute; then the host came up and asked her to look through his glass, and Felicia not liking to refuse, did as he directed and peeped through the long brass tube. At first everything looked blurred and indistinct, but a good deal of shifting and turning dispelled the clouds by degrees, then clearer and well-defined images grew out of the confused floating visions that had bewildered her at first. Then little by little she became absorbed in this new wonder-world into which she had come as by a miracle; she forgot the stage on which she stood; she heeded not the confusion of sounds round about her as she gazed, every moment more and more absorbed, into the spirit of that awful silence and snowy vast-

ness which seemed to spread before her. She seemed carried away on unknown wings into vast regions undreamt of hitherto, past snowy cavities, by interminable gorges haunted by terrible shrouded figures trailing their stiff grave clothes, and bending in an awful procession. Then came great fields of glittering virgin snow blazing in the sun, then perhaps a narrow track stitched by human footsteps, curiously discernible. Felicia could follow the line for a while, then she lost it, and again it would reappear, ever ascending, to the foot of a great gully, where all traces seemed lost. . . .

'How absorbed you are!' said Georgina's voice at her ear. 'Can you make anything out? May I have a look?' Felicia did not answer. She was trembling convulsively; then she suddenly seized the other woman's wrist in a tight clutch. 'I see something. O Georgina, for heaven's sake look, and tell me what you see.' But Georgina looking shifted the great glass and could not adjust it again. Felicia, wildly wringing her hands, began to call for a guide, for anyone who knew. 'I saw a man hanging to a rock, a tremendous rock,' she said. The guides and the host all came up in some excitement, and eye after eye was applied. 'You see the track, follow the track lower down, lower down,' cried Miss Marlow. 'Do you see nothing?' and then when none could find the place, she pushed the last comer away and with trembling hands followed again the tiny thread she had discovered, recalling each jutting peak

and form, and there was the great rock shining in the sun, but the man was there no longer. 'I saw him, I tell you,' she cried; 'he is killed, he has fallen. O Georgina, it may have been Colonel Baxter!' and she stamped in an agony of terror. Georgina with pale lips faltered something. The guides tried to reassure the ladies. It may have been fancy, people often were mistaken. 'I tell you I saw him slip,' cried Felicia, and old Johann, an experienced guide, looked, paused, and looked again. 'It is a nasty place,' said he, looking puzzled. 'It was close by there that we met the Englishman with his paint-box. That is our track the lady has been following, but there is another beside it. I cannot venture to say she is mistaken.' Felicia's conviction seemed to have spread to the guides. They examined the track again and again, and began talking the matter over. Two of them presently came forward, looking grave, and proposed that they should go off then and there, and see if there was anything to be done. 'It is like last night's experience over again,' said the host; 'the sun will be setting in a couple of hours; you must take lanterns if you go, for you won't be back by daylight, and what can you do, if so be the man has fallen? What did I say about people's foolhardiness?' he continued, turning to Georgina. 'Your papa has taken Peter, our man, with him, that is something reasonable. If this is one of the English travellers I told you of who went off alone, it will show you that I do not speak without thinking.'

Poor Mr. Bracy come back with Peter in another hour to share the general consternation. His first words were to inquire if Jasper had returned, and then he was told what had occurred. He kept up with great courage before the girls, declaring all would be well, but his looks belied his words. His face was pale and drawn; the poor little man stood with one helpless eye applied to the telescope long after the darkness had fallen, and it was impossible to distinguish any object at three yards' distance.

Felicia's secret fears were for Baxter, though the others maintained that it must have been Jasper she had seen. As the hours went on and the painter did not return, it seemed more and more likely that they were right. Baxter was safe enough, if she had but known it. He had not even been alone. He had been all day with the guide whom he had appointed to meet him. It was indeed poor Jasper whose peril had been revealed in that horrible minute.

Baxter was quietly returning with his friend Melchior, the guide, from a long day's walk in the snow, when he happened to see Jasper sitting at his easel perched on a rock, and sketching the surrounding abyss.

'There is a man I wish to avoid,' said the Colonel to his guide, and the man laughed, and proposed that they should make a short circuit and come back to the track just below the place where the painter was at work.

Jasper had not returned to luncheon on purpose; he

happened to have sandwiches in his pocket, and he wished to cause some slight anxiety. Now that the light was beginning to fail, he began to feel the want of his dinner; but a fancy seized him to climb a huge rock that rose abruptly behind him, and to get one last view of the surrounding country before going down. He had left his easel but a few yards behind him, he climbed a steep crag with great agility, and with some exertion he got round a sharp protruding block, which led, as he thought, to a little rocky platform, when suddenly his foot slipped. He had fallen but a little way, he righted himself with difficulty, and then slipped again. Jasper was frightened and completely sobered, perhaps for the first time in his life.

There was no one looking on. There were a few rocks and pine trees down below; overhead the great crags were fading from moment to moment into more terrible impassivity. He could scarcely imagine how he had ever reached his present perilous position. Was it he himself, Jasper Bracy, who was here alone and clinging desperately —was it for life—to the face of this granite boulder? What would they all say at home if they knew of his position? He could not face the thought, for he had a heart, notwithstanding all his vagaries. He seemed to realise it all so suddenly—his aunt's exclamations; his uncle's wistful face came before him. 'And poor Georgina,' thought Jasper.

All this did not take long to pass through his mind as

he clung desperately to the ledge on to which he had come; even to an experienced mountaineer it would have been an ugly pass. The rocks were hard as iron, worn smooth by a glacier; there seemed neither foot nor cranny to get on to; the evening was fast approaching: there was no chance of anyone descrying him from the distant châlet.

Jasper tried to say his prayers, poor boy; but he could not think of anything but the burning pain in his hands and back, the choking breath which seemed so terrible: his head swam, he knew that the end was at hand, he could hold on no longer. Perhaps five minutes had passed since he fell, but what a five minutes, blotting out the whole of the many many days and years of his life. He looked his last at the rock shining relentless; he closed his eyes. . . . I think it was at this moment that Felicia was screaming for assistance. If only she had kept her place a moment longer she would have seen help at hand.

Something struck his face. A voice, not far off, said, very quietly, 'Be careful. Can you get at the rope? We will pull you up. One! two! three!' Hope gave him renewed strength, and with a clutch he raised his left hand and caught the saving rope. For three seconds he was drawn upwards, scraping the rock as he went: happily its hard smoothness now was in his favour. Bleeding, fainting, he found himself drawn up to a ledge overhead. His senses failed.

When he came to himself, Baxter was pouring brandy down his throat, and the Swiss guide was loosening his clothes. They had seen him in the distance. The guide had suddenly stopped short, and exclaimed:

'Good heavens! that man must be mad. Where is he going to?' and pointed out Jasper's peril to the Colonel.

'We must go back,' said the Colonel, hastily. . . .

'I think I owe you my life,' said Jasper, hoarsely, but quite naturally, looking up with bloodshot eyes at Aurelius.

'Nonsense!' said the Colonel, kindly, 'it was Melchior here who spied you on your perch.'

CHAPTER XII.

DA CAPO.

While the travellers delay, the rocks are lighting up to bronze, to gold, to purple. The Wetterhorn is burning crimson-limned; the Mettelberg rocks are turning to splendid hue, the Vieschhorns answer like flaming beacons, and the great Eiger is on fire. But the hills to the east are shadowy mist upon palest ether, and a faint cloud like a sigh drifts along their ridge. So night comes on with solemn steps. Now the Wetterhorn is dying, the Vieschhorn pales to chillest white, though its summits are still flashing, rose-colour, flame-like, delicate. The people look up on their way, figures in the valley stand gazing at the wondrous peace overhead, gaze and drink their fill of the evening, and then the lingering benediction is gone with a breath. The rocks are cold and dead, the ether is changed from incandescence to veiled dimness. Nothing seems left but the sound of the stream, which before was hardly heard, but which now takes up the tale, rushing through the ravine fresh and incessant. A star appears, the washerwoman's window lights up in the valley.

'Will you tea in the balcony?' the waiter asks, coming up with a lamp, which he sets on the little table by Flora's elbow.

'Nong,' says the lady, 'dedang;' and she looks at her watch and wonders why they are all so late. Then again she reflects with some satisfaction that Mr. Bracy and the two girls are not likely to get into much mischief alone, and *that* Colonel is safe out of the way. Mrs. Bracy begins to grow hungry, and impatient for her family's return. They are quite absorbed in their own arrangements; they forget everything else. As usual, the spirit suffered from the matter's delay, and the temper also being frail and troublesome, seemed to trouble our poetess. When Chivers, Felicia's maid, came into the salle, to ask, a little anxiously, at what hour Mrs. Bracy was expecting them home, Flora snubbed Chivers as that personage was not accustomed to be snubbed, and sent her off in high dudgeon. A minute after, the woman returned, quite changed, with a curious scared face.

'Oh, ma'am!' she said, 'come out here; there's a boy from the shalley. He says—he says—I can't understand. The cook is talking to him. Oh, ma'am!'

Flora jumped up, with more activity than she usually showed, and hurried out into the passage, where, surely enough, a crowd stood round a boy, dressed in common peasant's clothes, who was emphatically describing something—a fall—a scream. Poor Mrs. Bracy turned very

cold, and forgot to analyse her emotions as she pushed her way through the guides and waiters.

'What, what?' she said. 'Speak English, can't you? What does he say?'

'Your gentlemen 'ave met with accident,' said one of the waiters. 'De young lady she see him—call for guide to help; dis young man come down to tell you.'

Then the young man said something in an undertone.

Poor Mrs. Bracy, almost beside herself now, asked with a sort of scream, 'Who was hurt? Was it her husband? was it Jasper?'

The boy didn't know, the waiter explained. 'He could tell nothing, only that it was a gentleman who had fallen, a long way from the Kulm Hotel. Would Madame please give a trinkgeld; he had run all the way with the news?'

For the next two hours the poor old poetess, brought back to everyday anxiety and natural feeling, suffered a purgatory sufficient to wipe out many and many an hour of selfish ease and hallucination. She ordered guides, brandy, *chaise-à-porteurs*, for herself and Chivers. No porters were to be had at that hour, not at least in sufficient numbers to carry so heavy a lady over the dark and uneven roads. Horses then. Two tired steeds were at length led up to the door, upon one of which the poor lady was hoisted, Chivers devotedly following. So they set forth heroically, with two guides apiece, with brandy,

with lanterns, and blankets, which Mrs. Bracy insisted on taking.

I cannot find it in my heart to describe that long, black, jolting, terrifying progress, the bumps and slips, the horrors, the brawling streams, the crumbling mountain ways along which they climbed.

'Fear nothing,' said the guides: but as they spoke, Chivers's horse came down on its knees, and Chivers gave a wild shriek. So they toiled on, over resounding bridges, up slippery paths, under dark thickets, coming out into a great open alp. Suddenly two huge black forms seemed to rise up, and bear slowly down upon them.

The guides only laughed rudely. 'Kühe, kühe,' said they, and then by degrees horns loomed out, and a heavy snuffling breath came through the darkness. The poor women were somewhat reassured. I do not know whether they ever would have reached the top of the long weary pass, which mounted in a long rocky ladder before them. Mrs. Bracy's horse had in its turn come down, and was scarcely roused by many an oath, as it stood trembling beneath its quavering burden. One lantern had gone out, and could not be lighted again. Chivers was crying—when suddenly there was a pause—one of the porters said 'Hist!' The second ceased swearing at the horse, to listen.

'What is it?' says Mrs. Bracy. 'Quoi?'

'People coming this way,' said the man.

'I hear 'em talking, mem,' says Chivers, hysterically.

Every moment the sound came clearer and nearer. At a turn of the path a light appeared overhead, then another and another; the tramp of feet, the sound of men talking, and then, could it be?—a laugh coming out of the darkness —a real hearty laugh.

Poor old Flora threw up her arms as she recognised her husband's voice, and burst into hearty, unaffected tears of relief, excitement, and fatigue. All must be well, or Mr. Bracy would not have burst out laughing in the dark, at such an hour, on such a road.

A minute more, it was a scene of greeting, exclamations, embraces, a snorting of horses, a waving of lanterns. The whole procession arrived, with Mr. Bracy ahead, running downhill, supported on either side by a porter He was much overcome, and filled with admiration by his wife's devotion. There was something peculiar in his manner.

'Noble woman!' said he. 'What exertion! You should have champagne, Flora, my love,' he said; 'it will revive you—quite revived by it myself. Have you brought any with you? Colonel! do you happen to have another bottle?'

Colonel! Poor Mrs. Bracy turned in horror and bewilderment, and by the lantern's light descried only too plainly Baxter and Felicia, arm-in-arm, coming down the steep path together, preceded by a guide with a lantern.

Shall I attempt to describe the descriptions, or to

explain the explanations. Some seemed to be of so extraordinary a character, that Flora Bracy had to exercise all her self-command to listen to them in silence. But Jasper's safety had softened the poetic heart, and she was unaffectedly grateful to the Colonel for the rescue. Of course, as Baxter said, anyone would have done as much, but not the less there do happily exist certain unreasonable emotions of gratitude in human nature which influence it out of the balance of exact debtor and creditor account.

'Fact was, my dear,' said Mr. Bracy, looking round and dropping his voice, 'the poor dear girl had been so anxious and worked up on Jasper's account, that when they all came suddenly on to the platform, just as we had almost given them up, she and Georgina both shrieked, and Felicia, I believe, rushed fainting into somebody's arms. The Colonel's, I believe. It was all a confusion. I was myself rather overcome. I was certainly concerned when Jasper afterwards told me the guides had been talking about Felicia and Baxter. If you had been there it would have been most desirable: however Felicia soon recovered: we gave her champagne—that champagne was really excellent, considering the circumstances. Curious thing, Flora, my love, the corks come out at a touch up in those high places. It might interest you to see—

'Do, Edgar, keep to the important subject in question,' said Flora, piteously; she was too completely crushed to be severe.

'You mean about—hum—hum—' says Mr. Bracy, getting rather breathless. 'Jasper first gave me a hint, and then the fact is, Baxter himself came up in the most gentlemanly manner, and told us both it was an old affair, that until now he had never had any certainty of his affection being returned.'

'And you, Edgar, placed in this most responsible situation, what did you say?' asked his wife.

'I said, "Colonel, I'll only ask you one question, which of the girls is it?" for I heard them both scream;' here Mr. Bracy stopped. Georgina herself had joined them, walking (she was too nervous to ride), and Jasper was comfortably jogging down upon Georgina's mule.

The lovers meanwhile straggled off with their guide by some short by-road. They seemed to have wings, some sudden power that made them forget fatigue, darkness, length of way, that bore them safe over stones and briars, from step to step along the steep and slippery road; little Felicia felt no weariness, no loneliness: she had reached home at last. They reached the little bridge some ten minutes before the rest of the company, and there they stopped for a moment; while Melchior walked on to announce the safe return of the whole party. It was a wonderful minute, silent and shadowy, and fragrant, stars streaming in the dark sky overhead; the water was rushing into the night; as it flowed it seemed to carry the stars upon its stream. The night breeze came across the plain and

fanned their faces; they were alone, and a blessing of silent and unspeakable gratitude was theirs. And so, after all this long doubt, Aurelius and Felicia had come to the best certainty that exists in this perplexing world, the sacred conviction of love—that belongs to all estates and conditions of men, not only to the married, not only to the unmarried, but to all those who have grateful hearts.

A POSTSCRIPT FROM A STAGE BOX

Reprinted, with Mrs. Riddell's permission, from 'Home.'

We all of us know, or if we do not know, we have all of us heard of Sadler's Wells Theatre, standing in regions very distant from the West-end. But the great circles of iron have brought this mighty city into bounds, and it is possible now-a-days to take one's pleasure, or to attend to one's business, half a dozen miles from home.

Sadler's Wells does not, however, depend for its audience upon the dwellers on the Capitoline hills of Mayfair or South Kensington. It has its own life, its own interests and sympathies: it is essentially the theatre of the Aventine—a Republic where the pit and the gallery rule supreme. It is a handsome building, well proportioned, of oval shape. A great stage fronts the audience. They come from the neighbouring streets and roads, from their dwellings by the river, from suburban squares and busy roads. What Sadler's Wells was once, we may still see painted on the curtain—a green rural place, shady and umbrageous, where hooped and powdered ladies, escorted by attentive gentlemen, trip to the restoring waters. If this were really a theatre for the Aventine—if we were Romans living in blue and yellow weather—this people's colosseum might have been left uncovered and open to the

stars of heaven; but, as it is, we are English, shuddering in a familiar atmosphere of crape and half mourning fog, and so the house is safely shut away from the winds and the weather, and the moonlight is home-made and manufactured expressly for the love scene.

A lovely moon, a lovely scene it is, as we find when the curtain rises, and the play begins, and then, in a little while, we are touched by some magic. The theatre fades away, that stage is no stage, London is not, Sadler's Wells is not; two centuries roll back the whole audience, the gardens, the moon-lit tragedy, all are conveyed away from the present to a past of Shakespeare's creation—to Italy, to Verona, to the home of Juliet, and of her lover.

Shakespeare, like Beethoven, works with a strange intimate charm, indescribable but unmistakable. As the people listen, all that they see and hear becomes their own, becomes themselves: their own secret told, their own feelings revealed. We never took poison, we never fought in the streets of Verona, we never conquered France; we never loved, hated, endured, philosophised, dreamed such dreams; never saw such sights in nature, never gathered such dewy flowers as Shakespeare did, nor heard the birds sing as they sang to him; but, nevertheless, as he speaks to us we know it all, we feel it all; we are touched, and made into poets, strung to some greater mood than our customary humdrum.

Last night we saw a thousand poets utterly bewitched,

charmed out of themselves, dwellers in Islington and Holloway, neighbours of the 'Angel,' humble pedestrians who count from one public-house to another. There they sat—gods in the gallery, poets in the pit—while the nightingales that sang in Shakespeare's time burst into a new song. Romeo and Juliet is very like the story a nightingale might tell. Beginning quietly, with some faint echo of what is to come, a low thrill, a pause—passion's note suggested and then silenced for a moment—then the jug-jug of commonplace, and then a great passionate outburst thrilling into every heart.

The theatre was full of hardworking, honest faces, busy people resting and forgetting their week's work, not lazy capitolines trying to wile away an evening; the pit surged to the stalls, the galleries were broad and filled with this good audience.

There were only about half-a-dozen boxes in all; I think four on either side. Two or three of these were tenanted by family parties who had come to see the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet. In one box a whole row of sociable, middle-aged, discursive people, evidently with many reminiscences of other Romeos and other Juliets, sat cheerfully discoursing, while their heads nodded. In the next box was a silent party; a beautiful young woman was sitting in the front, leaning with her head upon her hand. She was pale, dark-haired, a diamond star was flashing in her thick plaits, and a diamond was twinkling at her throat. She was dressed in

black velvet. A little white muslin girl, with lovely brown eyes, sat beside her; a middle-aged lady in a lace cap, and a tall gentleman, with a pair of opera glasses, made up the party. They all looked on very intently, though they did not say much about it. The tall gentleman was Dick Willoughby, the well-known theatrical critic of the *Daily Harlequin*. He had brought his wife, and her beautiful friend, Mrs. Baxter, and his little niece, to see the tragedy.

Willoughby, whose profession some persons may envy, and who was actually paid for going to the theatre, looked with a kind grim sort of sympathy at his little niece, who sat, breathless, with her dark curly head against the red curtain, wondering and absorbed by this unknown spectacle, this sea of passion now tossing before her towards some vast horizon undreamt of by little girls of fourteen now-a-days. She might have made a pretty study for a painter, had there been one present able to withdraw his eyes from the wonderful, the melodious, heartrending history enacted that night.

The play begins. Gay Mercutio, in his glittering doublet, has said his say; the fiery Tybalt has breathed vengeance against the Montagues; old Capulet, in his satin doublet, has tried in vain to calm his furious kinsman, when, lo! the scene changes.

The moonlight is streaming on the woods and gardens of Verona, on the terraces and heavy-scented flowers, on the balcony, where Juliet—dear, rebellious, tenderly-generous

Juliet—stands in her white robes. The light falls on the sweet face, with its wistful story. Then comes Romeo very quickly. He stands at the foot of the balcony; the lady bends from above; the scene seems touched with some mystic rapture.

'My bounty is as boundless as the sea—my love as deep. The more I give to thee the more I have, for both are infinite,' says Juliet's tender voice; and then she vanishes, with a soft white flash, returning, lingering, dying away, like summer lightning.

'Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast,' says Romeo, with all a true lover's tenderness.

'Oh! Uncle Dick,' said little Margaret, clasping her hands in speechless sympathy.

'You are not the first to say "Oh!" to all that, Peggy,' said Uncle Dick, kindly.

Then follows the scene in the friar's cell.

'Friar Lawrence is a first-rate conjuror to pull all those beautiful things out of that basket,' said Willoughby to his wife. 'Have you done with the glasses, Bell?' and he began looking in the direction of the opposite box, which had been empty till then; someone had just come in and sat down in a seat behind the curtain.

'It seems all so real, Aunt Bell,' said little Margaret, in a whisper; 'only *more* real than real things.'

'His wonderful wealth of language must have some-

thing to do with it,' said Willoughby, gently shutting up his glasses. 'He calls in all nature and all English to his aid; eh, Mrs. Baxter, don't it strike you so?'

He was looking at her with an odd expression, as if he wanted to hear her voice, to guess what she was thinking of.

'I am like Margaret—I can't analyse,' said Mrs. Baxter, in a low, vibrating voice. 'I think it was very happy for Juliet that she died with her faith in Romeo unchanged.' This she added, not bitterly, but with a heavy sigh. Mrs. Willoughby briefly interposed with a 'Hush! hush! Miss Bateman is coming.' She did not want her friend Felicia to dwell upon her troubles.

This is the fag end of a story which all happened years ago, only a little bit got broken off, so to speak, and was fastened on again by chance on this particular night. The hero and heroine of my little history loved each other long ago, tenderly, passionately, then they quarrelled, then they made it up and were married; they had loving but jarring tempers; he was suspicious, poor, easily angered; she was impetuous, diffident, exacting, because she loved him, and cared so much for him and for herself too, and because she cared so much for the quality of his love, and because she was jealous of someone far more suitable than herself. He was Colonel Baxter, a widower, when they were married—she had been an heiress, Felicia Marlow by name. The young mistress of Harpington Hall had been left very

young, very alone, very self-willed, to her own discretion and indiscretion, to her childish moods, to her makeshift life; she had been over-praised and over-loved, perhaps, by the cousin from whom she inherited the old house which had been her home and the scene of her failure and success in life. She had been engaged to him nominally, but they both knew that even if he recovered they were lovers only in name. Felicia's heart had beaten its own measure and ached to its own longing, although her future had been settled for her by others; then, when the time came, and she was free, and able to mould life to her heart's desire, she was perhaps disappointed by the result.

All this has been told elsewhere, but one odd phase of the story happened two nights ago, and I write it down as it was told me by some people who were present.

It was from Mrs. Willoughby I heard it all. She is a middle-aged woman who has known a good many people and seen something of the world (which means seeing something more than people sitting in rows in it), and Felicia Baxter and she were old friends. Mrs. Willoughby had been at Felicia's wedding, and admired—as who would not admire—the lovely young bride and the stately bridegroom, little thinking of the dismal result of all this white satin, organ-straining, promising, vowing, bridecake, and congratulations. Everything seemed propitious. One of Felicia's former lovers was present in a dejected attitude, the friends who approved, and the friends who disapproved

were there, all equally smart. The Colonel's little daughter, a child of twelve, was there with the aunt and the cousin who had brought her up, and with whom she was to remain till the couple returned. They were to spend a month or two at Rome and then come back. But though after a time they came back, little Lucy remained, by her father's wish, with the cousin for whom she had so great an affection.

When disagreements began between the Colonel and his wife, Colonel Baxter, who was a somewhat morbidly fastidious person, shrank from bringing his little Lucy from her peaceful home to witness the disturbance, and strange, almost inexplicable troubles of his new life. She was nearly thirteen. In a year or two she would be a woman. He was ashamed that the two women, who had made his home these ten years and more, should know of his present perplexities. He made one excuse and another to put off Lucy's coming, and Felicia guessed the reason, and felt a wild, miserable pang in her heart; self-reproach, acquiescence, bitter resentment, were all there in her foolish passionate soul.

One day she said to him—

'You married me, but you never loved me. Why did you come to disturb me? If it was only my money you wanted, you might have had it all for the asking.'

Baxter's dark face turned white.

'I can't forgive this,' he said. 'It is no use, Felicia;

I must go away. You can't say anything to undo this. I have felt it all coming for some time past. You have insulted me, wounded me, humiliated me past my endurance.'

'Oh! Jim, Jim. You would not have spoken to me so,' sobbed Felicia, apostrophising the dead cousin to whom she had been engaged.

'No, but I have not the forbearance that your cousin possessed; and though you broke his heart you shall not ruin my life and my child's,' said Colonel Baxter, in a cold, concentrated fury.

Felicia was frightened by his strange tone and strange looks, she came up and caught his hand.

'Leave me alone,' he cried; 'don't touch me.'

She ran out of the room with a pale face and desperate eyes; spoilt, lonely, inexperienced, she was not likely to make allowance for another somewhat spoilt child. She did not distinguish between hot temper and coldness of heart. Perhaps Mrs. Willoughby might have done some good then, but a friend happened to be staying in the house who certainly made matters worse. They had been bad enough before.

'We are born to be slaves and playthings,' said this lady, gloomily, with her fat foot on the fender. 'Some women have spirits too high for mean surrender to circumstance. Without such hearts as yours, my love, to bleed for the cause of right, and truth, and liberty, we should be

brought low indeed. Yes, dearest Felicia, *you* are one of these,' said Mrs. Bracy (that was the friend's name), suddenly turning full upon the quivering, pale, indignant lady of the house; 'you are of the company of these generous martyred ones.'

And so it happened that the two parted. Colonel Baxter made some excuse to somebody—the butler, I believe—and went away without seeing his wife again. Felicia, as usual, stayed on alone at Harpington. How often had she turned some page in her short life's history, and begun again to live alone! She was, perhaps, more forlorn now than she had ever been. People did not know her story for certain, but they whispered it about, and looked at her pitifully. She kept away, and could not face them.

It was not till some weeks had passed that Mrs. Willoughby brought her up to London by main force of will.

'The poor little soul will go out of her mind if she is left to brood all by herself in that dismal old place. I hate that Colonel Baxter, Dick,' said Mrs. Dick, emphatically.

'I saw him at the club the other day, looking uncommonly dismal,' said Dick Willoughby; 'depend upon it, in nine cases out of ten, it is the woman's fault when people quarrel. You can give in with grace, my dear; a man can't, without making a fool of himself.'

'Nonsense,' cried Mrs. Willoughby, laughing, 'you

never appear to greater advantage than when you give in, Dick.'

But the scene changes to Sadler's Wells once more, where they are all sitting in a row in their comfortable box, and watching the changing scenes. Mrs. Willoughby, who had taken up the glass, looked slowly round the theatre and paused for a moment, as her husband had done, upon the opposite box, but its occupant was hidden from view by the curtain. Mrs. Baxter did not look up or about; she sat listless, absorbed, listening; while a faint colour rose, and then died away on her pale cheek.

Meanwhile, people grow more and more interested; the storm of feeling upon the stage rises and engrosses the not unsympathetic audience; sorrow's knell is dinning; gallant Mercutio falls as bravely as he has lived; Romeo, driven to bay, is forced to revenge him; then comes the sentence and the passionate parting scene between the 'hour's wife' and her banished lover.

Little Margaret began to cry outright, the tears dribbled down her blue ribbons; Felicia never moved, she seemed to turn pale, and more pale.

It was at this instant that Mrs. Willoughby, happening to look round, caught a sight of the occupant of the opposite box, who, forgetting his precautions, had bent forward for a minute, then he withdrew almost immediately. That black, set face; that close cropped military head, surely she could not be mistaken; she glanced at her

friend anxiously, then she touched her husband's hand to attract his attention.

'Dick,' she whispered; 'do you see?'

'Yes; I saw him come in,' said Dick. 'Don't look, you might frighten him away.'

Then the critic, who had to write his article however much other people were distracted, went back to his notes again. Little Margaret followed every word with wrapt attention; to her the play was everything, and everything else nothing. Mrs. Baxter, too, seemed to have found some relief from the weight of her present troubles in Juliet's pathetic words; the colour rose into her cheeks, her eyes brightened.

'Brava, Juliet!' said Dick, when Juliet, after her great outcry of child-like terror, suddenly, nobly calm, drains the sleeping draught.

Then came that last great scene where life and death seem struggling for awhile, and the unseen and the present meet, and human beings fall prostrate. It was not till this last scene that the opposite curtain was pushed back, and that Colonel Baxter, seeing his wife's beautiful sad face leaning forward from the other side of the theatre, leant forward too.

Who was it spoke? was it Shakespeare who spoke in faithful ever-enduring words? was it Baxter? was it Felicia?—'Oh, my love, my wife,' says Romeo.

Felicia looked up, some voice had called; perhaps she

looked away because she could not face it all. Then the colour rushed into her pale cheeks. From across the great theatre the two saw each other. With a faint cry Felicia half rose and half mechanically put out her arms as Juliet had done; then she turned and caught at Mrs. Willoughby's outstretched hand.

'Did you see him? did you see?' she said.

'Oh, hush, listen!' cried little Margaret, bending forward.

'Come, I'll dispose of thee among a sisterhood of holy nuns,' says the friar. 'Stay not to question, for the watch is coming.'

'What's here— a cup closed in my true lover's hand?' moans Juliet.

Margaret was crying; Mrs. Willoughby jumped up from her seat, pulling Felicia away from the front of the box; there was a rattle at the handle of the door, it opened wide, and Colonel Baxter walked in.

'Fay!' he cried, 'Fay, forgive me; won't you forgive me?'

She gave a cry, a spring, and clung to him, close to his heart.

. . . . . .

Little Margaret never forgot her first play. I think Colonel and Mrs. Baxter's domestic troubles seemed to her very tame compared to Mr. and Mrs. Montague's.

Dick afterwards confessed to his wife that he had expected something of the sort. 'I was talking to my friend Mr. Fladgate at the club,' he said, 'and, hearing that he was to dine with Colonel Baxter, I took care to tell Fladgate that Mrs. Bateman had sent us a box for to-night, and that Felicia was coming with us.'

MISS MORIER'S VISIONS

CHAPTER I.

I was walking home one evening along an autumnal road, and hurrying, for I was a little belated, when I thought I heard a step following mine. I stopped, the step also stopped. I looked back, there was no one to be seen; but when I set off again I once more heard the monotonous footfall. Sometimes it seemed to miss a beat; sometimes it seemed to strike upon dead leaves, and then to hurry on again. This unseen march or progress was no echo of my own, for it kept an independent measure. The road was dull; twilight was closing in; the weather was dark and fitful; overhead the flying clouds were drifting across a lowering sky. All round about me the fogs and evening damps were rising. I thought of the warm fireside at Rock Villa I had left behind; to be walking alone by this gloomy road was in itself depressing to spirits not very equable at the best of times, and this monotonous accompaniment jarred upon my nerves. On one side of the road was a high hedge; on the other, a rusty iron railing with a ploughed field beyond it. A little farther away stood a lodge by two closed gates. The whole place had

been long since deserted and left to ruin—one streak in the sky seemed to give light enough to show the forlornness which a more friendly darkness might have hidden. It is difficult to describe the peculiar impression of desolation and abandonment this place produced upon people passing along the high road. The place was called 'The Folly' by the neighbours, and the story ran that long years ago some Scotchman had meant to build a palace there for his bride; but the bride proved false; the man was ruined. The house for which such elaborate plans had been designed was never built, although the gates and the lodge stood waiting for it year after year.

The lodge had been originally designed upon some fancy Italian model, but the terrace was falling in, the pillars were cracked and weather-stained, the closed gates were rust-eaten; the long railings, which were meant to enclose gardens and pleasure-grounds, were dropping unheeded. In the centre of the field, a great heap showed the place where the foundations of the house had been begun, and on the mound stood a signpost, round which the mists were gathering.

Meanwhile I hurried along, trying to reason away my superstitious fears. The steps were real steps, I told myself; perhaps there was some one behind the hedge. I thought of the old Ingoldsby story of the little donkey and the frightened ghost-seer. I scolded myself, but in vain; a curious feeling of helplessness had overcome me. I could

not even summon up courage to cross the road and look. I felt convinced that I should see nothing to account for the step which still haunted me, and I did not want to be thrown into terrified intangible speculations, which have always had only too great a reality for me. I was still in this confusion of mind, when I heard a sound of voices cheerfully breaking the silence and dispelling its suggestions, a roll of wheels, the cheerful patter of a pony's feet upon the road. . . . I turned in relief, and recognised the lamps of my aunt's little pony carriage coming up from the station. As it caught me up, I saw my aunt herself and a guest snugly tucked up beside her, with a portmanteau on the opposite seat.

The carriage stopped, to exclaim, to scold, to order me in. After a short delay the portmanteau was hauled up on the box to make room; Mr. Geraldine, the arriving guest, gave up his seat to me. I did not like to tell them how grateful I was for this opportune lift, or for the good company in which I found myself. The pony was not yet going at its full speed when we passed the lodge.

'Why, that place must be inhabited at last! there is a light in the window,' said my Aunt Mary, leaning forward as we passed the lodge.

As she spoke, a figure came out to the closed gate, and stood looking through the bars at the carriage. It was that of a short, broad-set man, with a wide-awake slouched over his eyes, and a rough pea-jacket huddled across his

shoulders. He seemed to be scanning the carriage; but when the lamps flashed in his face he drew back from the light. I just caught sight of a dull, sullen countenance; and as the carriage drove on, and I looked back, I saw that the solitary man was still staring after us, standing alone in the field with the streak of light dying in the horizon, and the vapour rising from the ground.

'That is not a cheerful spot to choose for a residence,' said Mr. Geraldine, deliberately. 'What can induce anybody to live there?'

'Something, probably, which induces a great many people to do very strange things,' said Aunt Mary, smiling: poverty, Mr. Geraldine.'

'That is an experience fortunately unknown to me,' said Mr. Geraldine, tucking the rug round his legs.

Rock Lodge is at some distance from a railway; the garden is not pierced by flying shrieks and throbs; it flowers silently amid outlying fields, with tall elm-trees to mark their boundaries. The road thither leads across flat country; it skirts a forest in one place, and passes more than one brick-baked village, with houses labelled, for the convenience of passers-by: Villa, Post Office, Schools, Surgery, and so on. We saw Dr. Evans's head peeping over his wire blind as we passed through Rockberry, and then five minutes more brought us to the gates of Rock Villa, where my aunt has lived for many years.

My cousins came out to greet the new comer. 'Aunt

Mary's bachelor,' they used to call him in private; in public, he was 'Uncle Charles.' The two little boys, my aunt's grandsons, appeared from their nursery. There was a great deal of friendly exclaiming. The luggage was handed up and down. Little Dick seized Mr. Geraldine's travelling-bag and nearly upset all its silver bottles on to the carpet. My aunt, Mrs. Rock, began introducing her old friend.

'You see, we have Nora and her boys, and Lucy and her husband,' said she, cheerfully ushering him in, 'and my niece, Mary Williamson, you know, and Miss Morier I think you also know; she is in the drawing-room.' And then Mr. Geraldine was hospitably escorted into a big room, full of lights, and fire, and tea, and arm-chairs, and conversation, and flowers, and all the usual concomitants of five o'clock.

CHAPTER II.

We had all been staying for some days at Rock Villa, and enjoying the last roses of summer from its warm chimney-corners. It is a comfortable, unpretending house, standing in a pretty garden, which somehow seems to make part of the living-rooms, for there are many windows, and the parterres almost mingle with the chintzes; the drawing-room opens into a conservatory; there is also a bow window with a cushioned seat, and a tall French glass door leading into the garden. The conservatory divides the drawing-room from the young ladies' room or study, which again opens into the hall. The dining-room is on the opposite side and the windows face the entrance gates. Inside the house, as I have said, the fires burnt bright in the pretty sitting-rooms; outside, the glories of October were kindling in the garden before winter came to put them all out. The plants were still green and spreading luxuriantly, stretching their long necks to the executioner; a golden mint of fairy leaves lay thickly scattered on the turf; from every branch the foliage still hung, painting trees with russet and with amber. On the stable wall

a spray of Gloire de Dijon roses started shell-like, pink against the sky. The guelder-rose tree by the hall door was crimson, the chestnuts were blazing gold.

The days passed very quietly; all the people in the house were very intimately connected with one another; married sisters are proverbially good company. The outside world was almost forgotten for a time in family meetings and greetings and personalities; Nora's husband, the Colonel, was in India; Lucy's husband, the clergyman, came up and down from London twice a week; Clarissa, the only unmarried daughter of the family, made music for us, for Mr. Geraldine especially, who delighted in good music; Miss Morier was also a very welcome visitor in my aunt's house. For many years she had been too ill and too poor to leave her own home; but her health had improved of late, and a small inheritance had enabled her to mix with her friends again. She was a peculiar-looking woman, with dilating eyes under marked brows; she may have been pretty once, but illness had destroyed every trace of good looks. She was delicate still, and on her way to the South for the winter: she was well educated, well mannered, and full of ready sympathy; gold and silver had she not in great abundance, but what she had to bestow upon others was the ease and help of heart which real kindness and understanding can always give. I could not help contrasting her in my mind with Mr. Geraldine, who was also unmarried, and in his way full of friendly interest in us all;

but then it was in his way. He was easily put out of it, easily vexed; punctual and, alas! often kept waiting; he liked to lead the conversation, and it rambled away from him; he was impatient of bores and they made up to him; he didn't like ugly people or invalids; he detested Miss Morier, and her place was always by his at table.

Notwithstanding these peculiarities we are all fond of him, and grateful too. Colonel Fox is supposed to owe his appointment to Mr. Geraldine's influence. Lucy's husband, the curate, declares that half his parish is warmed and beflannelled with Uncle Charles's Christmas cheque; there is no end to his practical kindness and liberality. The intangible charities of life are less in our old friend's way, perhaps. As we were all sitting round the fire that evening after dinner, the conversation was turned upon our meeting in the road.

'Were you frightened, Mary?' said my aunt; 'you were walking very fast.'

'I was never more glad to see you, Aunt Mary,' said I, gaining courage to speak of my alarm, and I told them my story.

'One has all sorts of curious impressions when one is alone,' said my aunt, hastily. 'You mustn't go out by yourself so late, my dear. It must have been fancy, for we should have seen anyone following you.'

'Footsteps?—how very curious!' said the curate. 'Do

you remember, Lucy, the other day I thought we were followed?'

'Clarissa, will you play us something?' interrupted my aunt, rather uneasily; 'Mr. Geraldine has not yet heard the march from "Glück."'

'You need not be afraid of my nerves,' said Miss Morier, smiling. 'I have quite got over my old troubles, dear Mrs. Rock, and I can hear people discuss hobgoblins of every sort with perfect equanimity.'

My aunt evidently disliked the subject very much. She did not answer Miss Morier, and again said something about tea-time; but Nora, with some curiosity, asked:—

'What was it, dear Miss Morier, what were your special hobgoblins.'

'I don't mind telling you,' said Miss Morier, turning a little pale, as if she had somewhat overrated her own strength of nerve. 'I used to see the figure of a man, a common-place looking man in a wig, and muffled in some sort of cloak: you will laugh, but you cannot imagine what misery it caused me. At times I saw the whole figure advancing towards me; sometimes it was retreating; sometimes only the head appeared. I found out at last that by a strong effort of will I could dispel the phantom. When I was once convinced that it was some effect upon my nerves brought on by physical weakness, I was able to overcome it. The apparition was always accompanied by a peculiar

sensation which I can hardly describe; a sort of suspense and loss of will, which came over me suddenly at all sorts of times and in different places.'

'I have been reading some of those accounts of Shelley's visions, in that series of Morley's,' said Mr. Geraldine, rather scornfully; 'and the mysterious attacks upon him, and the apparition of the child coming out of the sea. He was a vegetarian, and he only drank water, which more than accounts for such cases of brain affection,' said he, with a glance at poor Miss Morier, who was a teetotaller. 'There are whole families, it is well known, who are subject to such hallucinations.'

'I can't agree with you in thinking it altogether physical,' said the curate gravely. 'If all the tens of thousands of alleged phenomena witnessed in all parts of the world, and attested by experienced observers, be illusions, the fact would be more marvellous than the greatest marvel among them.'

'But surely,' said my aunt, impatiently, 'the more common such things are, William, the more it also proves that it is a recognised affection depending on certain states of health not fully understood. I have no doubt Mary's nerves were overstrung, and magnified some slight noise.'

'All I can tell you,' said I, 'is that I heard the steps quite plainly.' I spoke rather crossly, for they did not seem to give me credit for common sense. My aunt cut it short by saying I must not walk out alone again; and

then came tea, music, bedroom candlesticks, good-nights The curate went off with a pipe to some spot where tobacco was recognised at Rock Villa; Mr. Geraldine selected a book and a paper-cutter, and also disappeared; Clarissa, my youngest cousin, carried me off to her own room for a long midnight conversation. It lasted till the small hours, and I was creeping down to bed, carefully creaking through the sleeping house, when I thought I heard a faint cry. As I passed Miss Morier's door, I again heard it—a sort of agonised sigh.

I stopped short, and without further hesitation opened the door, which was not locked, and walked in. . . .

The room was full of moonlight; there was no candle, only a dim nightlight burning near the bed; the blinds were undrawn. In the middle of the room stood Miss Morier, in her white dressing-gown, with her long grey curls falling over her shoulders. She looked very pale in the moonlight; she gave a sort of gasp when she saw me.

'Who is it? What was it?' she said wildly. 'Have you also seen? Oh, tell me! Thank you for coming.' And then she caught me by the arm, and burst out crying. 'You will think me so foolish,' she sobbed, still clinging to me. 'I thought I was cured; my old trouble has come upon me again to-night. I should not have talked of it. I saw him there, out in the moonlight,' she said, pointing to the window and looking away.

I went to the window and saw nothing but the broad

moonlight streaming upon the lawn, and the shadows of the bushes. There was a high clear frosty sky, a few cold stars were shining above the trees, one branch glistened and seemed to shake in the darkness.

Miss Morier recovered herself after a minute. She drank some water, grew calmer, again thanked me for coming, begged me to say nothing to anyone of her fright, and gratefully accepted my proposal that we should unlock the door between our rooms. Her alarm did not affect me, though I was very sorry for her, and after this night a certain slight barrier which had divided us hitherto seemed to be completely done away. I kept her secret as she desired. The subject was never mentioned between us. I could understand that the less she dwelt upon such nervous affections, the better it must be for herself and for everyone else.

CHAPTER III.

But, perhaps, silence is not after all the best receipt for morbid impressions. I used to find myself watching Miss Morier, wondering whether her ghostly visitor was present to her; if she turned, if she looked about the room, as she had a way of doing, I used to imagine unseen visitants among us, or peeping over our shoulders. One day, in the garden, I thought I heard someone coming up to join me, and when I turned there was no one to be seen; then a curious uncomfortable sensation of being watched came over me, of something near and yet unrecognisable, of some one haunting my steps. One day Miss Morier came in from the fields and sat down impatiently by the fire. 'Can you imagine what it is,' she said, 'never to be able to shake off the feeling of being followed? I never seem to be alone. I cannot bear it, I must get away. I think, perhaps, change of scene may help me.'

I hardly knew how to answer her. This I knew, that I too had felt the same sensations. If we walked in the garden, there would be odd rustlings among the trees and bushes; sometimes of an evening it seemed to me that eyes

were looking at us through the uncurtained windows; a sense of an invisible presence used to come over me suddenly as I sat busied with my own affairs; looking up, I might see nothing, but it would seem to me as if something had been there.

That very afternoon, after she left me, I remained alone in the drawing-room, reading by the fire and absorbed in my book, when this peculiar sensation of being watched made me turn round suddenly. This time I did see something which seemed to me more tangible than a ghost should be. It was a dark figure, starting from a corner of the room and vanishing into the conservatory. I saw it distinctly cross the window. I jumped up and followed, knocking over a table and a vase of flowers on my way; only, when I reached the conservatory, there was no one to be seen. The door was open to the garden and a chill wind was blowing in. Mr. Geraldine, hearing me call, came out from the study where he had been writing. I asked him if he had seen anyone pass by, and he began some joking answer.

'It is no joking matter,' I cried. 'Pray do call some one.'

We called everybody and looked everywhere, and searched the grounds, but nothing was discovered.

My younger cousins had also been in the study, and had seen nothing, heard nothing but the crash of the table. Mr. Geraldine continued his gibes, and I could

see that the others only half believed me. The servants were desired to be careful about closing doors and windows. It was impossible to be really nervous in so large and cheerful a household, and by degrees the subject was dropped. Nevertheless, Miss Morier went on hurrying the preparations for her departure; she engaged a maid, packed her boxes; she was to start at the beginning of the week. She seemed in a fever to be off.

'Maria was always an excitable person,' said my aunt, who was vexed by this sudden departure. 'Once she gets a thing into her head, there is no changing her mind; she has always been fanciful since her trouble.'

'What were her troubles?' said my cousin Nora. Then my aunt told us something of her friend's early life. She was to have been married to a young officer, who was killed in India, and she never really got over the shock, although she was once engaged to some one else. 'It was her mother's doing, for the man was supposed to be rich; but it was a miserable business,' said my aunt. 'Maria nearly died of the strain. She seemed to hate the man, though he had obtained some strange power over her too. He was desperately in love with her, people blamed her for breaking it all off, but I always advised her to do so. I always thought he exercised a sort of magnetic power over her; she had a long nervous illness after they separated.' My aunt ceased abruptly, for as she was

speaking the door opened, and Miss Morier came in ready dressed for a walk.

'Is it prudent of you to go out?' said my aunt. 'I don't trust these afternoon gleams.'

'Oh, yes,' cried Miss Morier, eagerly. 'The day is fine, and I feel so well, and it is quite early yet.' And then, as she seemed to wish for a companion, I offered to go with her.

We had paid our visit, and we were half-way home, when the fine sunshine suddenly vanished. It was gone, and then the clouds gathered overhead, and in a few minutes great chill drops began to fall in our faces. We had nearly half a mile to walk, and I felt not a little uneasy about my companion, who was very delicate, and not well able to bear sudden changes of temperature. We were walking along that straight high-road, of which I have already made mention, when the storm broke into a great downpour of rain and hail, falling straight from the sky overhead. My companion was hurrying along by my side with flushed cheeks and panting breath. We were very wet by the time we reached the lodge, which looked more dismal than ever, presenting its Italian columns to the rain; but some shelter was to be found in the portico. At my suggestion we stood up with our backs to the closed door waiting till the violence of the rain should abate. It was a dreary refuge enough; the field looked black, and the mist was creeping along the ground, the railings were

dripping. It was early in the afternoon, but the evening seemed suddenly to be closing in. Maria Morier shivered and drew close to the door, and then immediately we heard a creaking. The lodge door opened—two shaking hands held it back for us.

'You can come in,' said a voice; 'the door is open.' Maria started, shrank back, and then with a strange fixed look, said faintly, 'We must go in, it is too late,' and she walked into the lodge.

It consisted only of one room, big and dark and dull, and scarcely furnished. There were two narrow windows looking different ways, with lattice panes. There was a big divan in a sort of recess. In the centre of the place stood a round table with a velvet table-cloth half pulled aside, and all stained and dirty; the walls had once been papered with some red flock paper, it was falling here and there in discoloured strips. There was a medicine-bottle on one of the window-ledges, with a pair of shabby old boots covered with mud, and a candle stuck into a bent and once gilt candlestick. As my eyes became more accustomed, I recognised the man I had seen watching us through the gates. 'You can wait a bit,' he said, but his voice frightened me, it was so harsh and so hollow. His face looked pale and sullen, but his eyes were burning. An old wig was pulled over his forehead. He stood holding on by the back of a chair.

CHAPTER IV.

THE rain was still beating and pouring upon the roof and against the windows. The old man had sunk into the chair from which he must have risen to admit us; he sat staring at Maria with a curious watchful inquiring look. He put me in mind of some animal caged away and dazed by long confinement. A sort of mist came creeping from beneath the door. They both looked so strangely that I thought it best to try and speak, I could not understand their curious fixed looks.

'It is very kind of you to let us in,' said I. 'My friend is not strong, and might be seriously ill if we were out in the rain. It is very good of you to give us shelter.'

'Shelter!' said the old man. 'Don't you see that this is the gate-keeper's house—gates to nowhere. I'm my own keeper.'

He spoke with a sneer, and sank back with the effort. Then he began again, still staring at Maria Morier.

'I knew you were coming. You did not think who it was that was about to give you shelter, or you would have stood out drenching in the rain sooner than come in.'

He said all this a little wildly. I could not understand him. Miss Morier looked more and more frightened, and I too began to be alarmed. We had sat down upon the only convenient seat—the divan in the recess. I took Maria's hand, it was icy cold. The man sat fronting us, with his back to the door. He did not speak like a gentleman, nor as if he was a common man. Poor wretch! what a miserable life he must have led for days past in this lonely place. He began muttering to himself after a while.

'There she sits,' I heard him say. 'She is an old woman now. Who says people change? I do,' he shouted suddenly, starting to his feet; 'they change—they lie—they forget, d—— their false hearts,' and he dashed his hand to his head.

I was so startled by his sudden fury that I, too, started to my feet, still holding my friend's hand.

'Does she look like a woman you might trust?' he cried. 'Smooth-spoken and bland, she fools us all; poor fools and idiots, ruined for her sake. Ay, ruined body and soul!'

By this time I was fairly terrified. Miss Morier, strange to say, seemed less frightened than at first. She looked at the door expressively, and we tried to get nearer to it; but he was too quick, and put himself in our way.

'*You* may go,' he said, very excitedly, pointing to me. 'I've taken you for her more than once, and nearly come

upon you unawares, but to-day there is no mistake. I have waited for her all this time, and she can stay a bit now she has condescended to come to me. This might have been her lodge-gate once, all new and furbished up. It's not fit for my lady to bide in for an hour; but good enough for me to die in like a dog, alone.'

It was a most miserable, terrifying scene. Miss Morier spoke very calmly, though I could see what a great effort she was making.

'I shall be glad to stay till the rain is over,' she said; 'and then, perhaps, you will show us the way back.'

Her words, civil as they were, seemed to exasperate him.

'So you speak,' he said, in a shrill sort of voice. 'Mighty civil is my lady, but she shall not escape for all her silver tongue. I have followed you all these days,—followed your steps, waited your coming; and now you are come to me, and you shall not leave me, you shall not leave me!' he cried, in a sort of shriek, and I saw something gleam in his hand. He had got a knife, which he flourished wildly over her head, 'Yes, you are come,' he cried, 'though you have forgotten the past, and David Fraser, the ruined man.'

Miss Morier, who had been shaking like an aspen, suddenly forgot all her terror in her surprise and spontaneous sympathy. '*You* David! David Fraser! Oh! my poor David!' she said, stepping forward with the kindest,

gentlest pity in her tones, and only thinking of him and his miserable condition, and forgetting all fears for herself.

I don't know whether it was her very kindness that overcame him. As she spoke, he threw up his arms and let them fall at his side, dropping the knife upon the floor. He seemed to catch for breath, and then, before we could either of us catch him, he had fallen gasping and choking and senseless at our feet. We could not raise him up, but Maria lifted his head on to her knee, while I loosened his shirt and looked about for water. There was no water, nothing in the place, and I could only soak my handkerchief on the wet flags outside, and lay it on his head. The rain was stopping; a boy was passing down the road, and I called to him, and urged him to hurry for help—to the doctor's first, and then to my aunt's house. I hastily wrote a pencil line upon the card for him to show, and he set off running. Then I went back into the house; it was absolutely bare, neither firing nor food could I find. There was a candle and there were some lucifers, which I struck, for the twilight was falling. 'Some one will soon be here,' I said to Miss Morier.

'Rub his hands,' she said in a whisper; and we chafed the poor cold hands. The man presently came to himself, and began muttering again. As I looked at the poor patient, I could hardly believe this was the same man we had been so alarmed by. His wig had fallen off, and we could see the real lines of his head. He was deadly pale,

but a very sweet expression had come into the sullen face. His talk went rambling on in some strange way. He seemed to know Miss Morier, for he kept calling her by her name. Then he appeared to imagine himself at some great feast or entertainment.

'Welcome to my house, Maria,' he said; 'welcome to the Towers. Tell the musicians to play louder; scatter flowers; bring more lights, it is dark; we want more lights.'

As he spoke a curious bright reflection came shining through the window that looked towards the field.

'Is some one coming?' said Maria, trying to raise the helpless figure. 'Oh, go to the door.'

I went to the door and flung it open, and then I stood transfixed. It was not the help we longed for. I cannot explain what I saw—I can only simply describe it. The light which had been shining through the window came from across the field: from a stately phantom house standing among the mists, and with many lighted windows. I could see the doors, the casements all alight. I could even trace the shadows of the balconies, the architectural mouldings. The house was a great square house, with wings on either side, and a tall roof with decorated gables. There were weathercocks and ornaments, and many shining points and decorations. It seemed to me that, from time to time, some dreamy faint sound of music was in the air. It was all very cold; I shivered as I stood there,

and all the while I heard the poor voice rambling on—calling to guests, to musicians. 'Welcome to my house,' he said, over and over again. 'I built it for her, and she has come to live in it.'

This may have lasted a minute or two—I stood bewildered; then I heard Maria calling, and as I was turning away, suddenly the whole thing vanished. 'Oh, come!' she said. Some gleam of recognition had dawned into the sick man's eyes. He looked up at her, smiled very peacefully, and fell back. 'It is all over,' she said, bursting into a flood of tears. A minute after there came a knocking at the door—it was the doctor, but he was too late.

I cannot account for my story. I have told it as it occurred. When the doctor came, and I opened the door to him, the field was quite empty and dark, the black shadows were creeping all about it, the signpost stood upon the mound. The house had disappeared with its many lights.

I asked the doctor afterwards if he had seen anything coming along, but he said 'No;' and when I told my story, he tried to persuade me it was some effect of the mists on the marshy ground; but it was something more than that. I believe it to have been the impression in the mind of the dying man made visible to me. It is certain that he had for years exercised some strange in-

fluence over Maria; whether or not he was able to present his own image before her, or whether it was indeed the man himself who had dogged our steps of late, I cannot tell. Sympathy is from the soul, and we all gratefully acknowledge it, but besides sympathy there is an undeniable material influence, telling more vividly upon some than upon others, and quite apart from the diviner gift. Perhaps some day a scientific name may be found for it.

ACROSS THE PEAT-FIELDS

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

OLD MSS.

Not long ago the children opened a drawer in my writing-table and found a little roll of dusty manuscript which I myself had written many years ago. It was a story in which some true things were told with others that were not true, all blended together in that same curious way in which, when we are asleep, we dream out allegories, and remembrances, and indications that we scarcely recognise when we are awake. Story-telling is, in truth, a sort of dreaming, from which the writer only quite awakes when the last proof is corrected. These visions seem to haunt one, and to contend with realities, and at times to flash into definite shape, and voice, and motion, and to hold their own almost independently of our will, and to impress us, as real voices and impulses do in everyday existence.

When the children, who take a faithful interest in my

performances, brought me this dusty packet, I read it through, and once more found myself in a little village in France, which I had scarcely thought of for years and years. There it stood among its plains, sunning itself in the autumn rays; all the people who used to live there with us came marching out of the drawer, bringing fruit in their hands, rolling barrows piled with golden pumpkins, carrying great baskets of purple plums, or sweet green-gages oozing golden juice, great jugs of milk, and wheaten loaves baked in the country ovens, and I was Polly Williamson again, a schoolgirl of fifteen, with my pocket full of apples. Not only people, but the bygone animals too, came out of this ark. A black retriever making for the water, the turkey-cocks perching on our doorsteps, the little black hen with the crooked bill; the poor tortoise-shell cat, who died of hunger, shut up in the cellar below the kitchen. We had a cook—a hateful woman—who had once tried to poison the poor creature, and who laughed at our dismay when we learnt its ultimate fate. No one else had heard its cries. The rambling old place seemed made for some such tragedy, piled together with dark corners, hidden passages, stone flights, and heavy masonry. The walls were of thickest stone. There was a sort of dungeon under the flight of steps that led to the house-door, and the dining-room had two hiding-places opening on either side of the jam cupboard. All round the drawing-room a secret passage ran between the wall and the wooden panelling.

This passage was lighted by a narrow window, all hidden by leaves of the vine-tree. The drawing-room windows opened into a sweet garden full of flowers and straggling greenery. At the end of the walk by the vine wall stood a little pavilion, with a pointed roof and a twirling weather-cock, with casements north, east, and west. This little pavilion seemed to guard the entrance of the village. People said that the old farm had once been a hunting-lodge built by Henry IV., who came here with his Court. I could imagine any one of the old pictures I had seen in the Louvre and elsewhere made alive, the gay cavalcade sounding and galloping away, disappearing along the high-way; horses prancing, squires following, horns sounding, and scarfs flying in the air. Sometimes the King ruled at the Château de Visy, so the legend ran; but the Château was the Queen's and the hunting-lodge was the King's, and the little pavilion where we girls all did our lessons together, and blotted our German exercises, had been built for some aigretted lady of the Court.

Visy le Roi is a village not far from Corbeil, a well-known country town in France. It is a district where the sun sets across miles of flat spreading fields that are crossed and recrossed in every direction by narrow canals, of which the sluggish waters reflect the willows planted along their course. These streams are darkened by the colour of the banks on either side. The earth is nearly black; the water is stained by strange tints. The country is sombre

with peat-fields, and here and there are peat-manufactories, standing lonely against the sky. When the fires blaze they are reflected on the waters as they flow with a certain sluggish persistent tide. Every here and there at crossways are deep pools where lilies and green tangles are floating on the brown eddies. Sometimes of an evening, when the sun sets over the black fields, long-drawn chords of light strike against the stems of the poplar-trees, and then their quaint mop heads seem on fire, while the flames roll down from the West with vapour and with murky splendour. The figures passing along the roads on the way homewards, the blue blouses, the country-women carrying their baskets on their arms or their faggots on their backs, are strangely illumined by these last beams of daylight. Some of Millet's sketches at Paris a year ago brought a remembrance to my mind of the roads and country places that I had haunted in my early youth. Few painters have drawn such wide fields as he; plains stretching so far—hours so long, as I remember them in those days, when they passed with strangely slow and heavy footsteps. The hours are shorter now. The plains are sooner crossed; horizons close in. Hope is less and less deferred.

The inhabitants of Visy le Roi might be bakers or grocers in public; in private, after business hours, and at the backs of their houses, they were comfortable people, with pleasant gardens—in which they spent much of their time, among an abundance of pumpkins, of vine wreaths

of reflecting glass globes on wooden stems, and blue lupins. Some of the people in the village, finding the gardens at the back of their houses insufficient for their requirements, cultivated quadrangles outside the village, where they would water their rose-trees quietly of summer evenings. It was a quiet place, of few events and of easily amused inhabitants.

I remember that one day a travelling organ came round to Visy, and was for half the day in the market-place grinding its tunes, and we talked of it for a week. The people inside the church could hear it. The old grocer's little granddaughters stood in the shop-door dancing and practising their steps; they were pretty little pensionnaires from the convent, with blue ribbons and medals like Pauline's tied round their necks. The old couple looked on, nodding their heads in time to the children.

'They are beginning early,' said the Maire, kindly, as he was passing by with a watering pot in his hand, and a dog at his heels; 'they will be ready for the St. Côme. The St. Côme was an annual dance at Estournelles, hard by, to which the whole village was looking forward. . . .'

The Maire of Visy le Roi was very proud of his garden, which was neatly spread out in front of his stone house and ornamented by two large black balls reflecting each other and the street, and our opposite gateway, and our dining-room windows, and his tidy plots of marigolds and scarlet-runners, which were our admiration. He used to

be specially active on summer evenings, and might be seen clipping, and chopping, and brushing away insects. He was not married in those days; he settled in Normandy after his first marriage, and sold his property at Visy. In fact, circumstances had made the place distasteful to him. He was a sensitive, kind-hearted man, although a somewhat absurd one. One of our party, a young French lady, who has since made a name for herself, was a good musician, and evening after evening I have sat listening to the flow of her music and the scrapings of M. Fontaine's violin. I made bold to put them into a book long after, but here they are in the catgut. How plainly the strains still sound coming out of the darkened room, with the figures sitting round; the windows are open to the dim garden, and I can still hear the dinning accompaniment of the grasshoppers outside whistling their evening song to the rising stars.

My granduncle, who was of an ingenious turn of mind, had come to Visy to try a machine he had invented, and to make experiments in the manufacture of peat-fuel. It is certain that with his machine, and the help of an old woman and a boy, he could produce as many little square blocks of firing in a day as M. Mérard, the rival manufacturer, in three, with all his staff, including his cook and his carter's son. It is true that our machine cost about 300*l.* to start with, and that it was constantly getting out of order and requiring the doctoring of a Paris engineer; but set-

ting that aside, as Monsieur Fontaine proved to us after an elaborate calculation, it was clear that a saving of 35 per cent. was effected by our process

The engineer from Paris having failed us on two occasions, I believe that my granduncle had at one time serious thoughts of constructing a mechanical engineer, who was to keep the whole thing in order, and only to require an occasional poke himself to continue going. I remember once seeing a wooden foot wrapped up in cotton wool in a box in our workshop, but I believe this being went no further. The Frankenstein's foot alone cost twelve pounds, so that it is easy to reckon how other more complicated organs would have run up the bill. I asked my uncle once whether the creature when complete would be content to live in the shed, or insist on coming home of an evening and joining the family circle. 'Who can tell?' said my granduncle laughing; 'perhaps it may turn out an agreeable member of society, and Fontaine himself will be cut out in his attentions to Mademoiselle Mérard.'

Old Mérard was the rival manufacturer. He came down in his slippers one day to inspect our designs; he did not think much of them, and declined to purchase the patent. He and Madame Mérard, and Mademoiselle Léonie, were, so he told us, starting for their estate in Normandy. Madame Mérard and her daughter never missed the bathing season, and were always accompanied by Monsieur; he was a tidy-looking old fellow, Madame

was a dark and forbidding-looking person—a brunette, my polite old uncle called her, when I complained that she frightened me with her moustache and gleaming white teeth. Madame Mérard had a strange effect upon people's nerves. I always felt as if she was going to bite me. As for Mademoiselle Léonie, she was a washed-out, vapid, plaintive personage, in grey alpaca and plaid ribbons. She embroidered, she sang out of tune, she shuddered at the mention of a Protestant. She would have been a nonentity but for her ill-temper, which fascinated Fontaine. I never could otherwise account for the attraction which our friend seemed to find in her society.

CHAPTER II.

BLACK CANALS AND YELLOW PUMPKINS.

After the Mérards' departure for Petit-port, we saw a great deal of M. le Maire. He was a sociable creature, and consoled himself for his Léonie's absence by various gentle flirtations in the village. Our life would have been monotonous but for his cheerful visits and friendly introductions. All our acquaintance in the place we owed to him. He introduced us to the new-made Lords of the Manor, the Fourniers at the Castle (he brought us a message from Madame Fournier requesting us to call there any day our religion might permit), the Mérards, the fascinating Madame Valmy, Captain Thompson, our compatriot; upon all these persons we called at Fontaine's suggestion, and escorted by him. But we did not greatly care for visiting. Some of us were too old, some of us were too young, to need much company beside our own. We young ones lived in good society. Poets sang to us in the mornings under the shady vine trellis, and of evenings by lamplight and by moonlight; we had the company of philosophers too, and of romancers, charming in those days with an art which

I can remember with a sort of wonder. So we rose betimes, worked and rested, studying in barns and trellised bowers, exploring the farms and farmyards round about. When we had written our exercises, practised our fingers upon the piano, closed our lesson-books, agricultural arts awaited us. Muslin bags had to be made for the sweet heavy bunches of ripening grapes. The pumpkins had to be met, counted, disposed of. I remember one dewy morning when the first pumpkin opened fire, if I may so describe its advent. Next day there were twenty large golden disks, and then from every side they upheaved, growing upon us hour by hour, multiplying, rolling in, in irresistible numbers; hanging from the tops of the walls. From every corner these monstrous creatures encircled us. Poor Fontaine was in despair; it was a plague of pumpkins. 'There are those who like pumpkin soup,' said he, doubtfully. Here we all cried out, protesting we had had pumpkin soup every day for a week; we did not like it at all. But my eldest cousin, the housekeeper, declared that it was absolutely necessary, and so the remainder of our stay was embittered to us by the tides of this milky, seedy, curd-like mixture.

Our visit to the Fourniers was a very solemn event. From the very first Monsieur Fontaine had been anxious that we should realise the glories of the Castle.

'You will see—pure Henri Quatre—Monsieur Fournier bought it direct from the Mesnils, and has not yet refurnished the reception-rooms. The Mesnils had owned it

for years, but the late Count ruined the family, and they were forced to sell at his death. Madame la Comtesse signed the papers before me as well as her son. She was in a fury, poor woman! I tried to soothe her; she flung the pen into my face; her son, Monsieur Maurice, apologised. "My dear friend," I said to him, "do not mention it."'

Monsieur Fontaine came to fetch us on the appointed day, to take us up to the Château. My cousins would not join us, but my uncle put on his short round cloak, and we set off together. On the way along the village street, Monsieur Fontaine gave us information about the various inhabitants. 'Ah! there goes the doctor; that good Poujac; he is the most amiable character. Monsieur le Curé says he never had a more devout parishioner, and yet if I were seriously ill, I should send to Corbeil, I think, for further advice. Madame Valmy has the greatest confidence in him. He nursed her husband in his last illness It was most alarming for her—it was cholera. Poor Valmy died within twenty-four hours; she is only now out of mourning. She has passed the winter at Paris—I should like to pass the winter at Paris,' sighed Fontaine, 'but my duties keep me here, and when my vacation comes,' he said consciously, 'I am to remain a fortnight with my friends, the Mérards at Petit-port, for the bathing season. Mademoiselle Léonie's health requires sea-bathing; she has not the physique of Mademoiselle Pauline at the Castle.'

As he spoke, we had a vision of Mademoiselle Pauline herself in the distance, actively trudging alongside the canal. Monsieur Fontaine became very much excited as he pointed her out to us. She was followed by a maid-servant carrying a basket, and who was walking quietly, with long country footsteps, and wearing a white coiffe, a handkerchief across her shoulders, and a big apron, with pockets. But her young mistress, unconscious of Fontaine's signals, sometimes hurried ahead, sometimes lagged behind to gather dock-leaves, branches of green, and marsh-mallows, of which she had made a sort of wreath, bound together by broad blades of grass. I could see the two heads passing between the willow stumps; some bird wheeled round overhead, and returned to its nest in a willow-tree; some water-rat splashed from its hole at the root of an alder. The young person walking ahead hearing this splashing, stopped short and went down on her knees among the grasses; the maid-servant, who had long since outgrown the age of weasels and water-rats, and had matured to domestic interests, went on her way.

What a strange feeling it gives to write of all this that happened so long ago, vividly flashing before one's mind like the splash of the water-rat. I remember how the willows stood at intervals with their black stumpy stems, how all the purples and golds of the evening were reflected in the peat-stained water, shining in the green foliage and on the bricks of the old walls of the park.

'Mademoiselle!' said the Maire, politely stepping forward.

Pauline, still upon her knees, looked round into our faces while the Maire introduced us, and the water-rat darted away. She scrambled up; her dress was all dabbled with water, smeared with black earth, and also on fire with the evening light; so was her hair, which was oddly dressed in two twisted horns in the fashion of those days. There was something rude and honest about Mademoiselle Pauline which attracted me to her. She had a thick waist, country shoes; she wore a blue ribbon with a medal round her neck. She had pudgy red hands. She acknowledged Fontaine's elaborate introduction by squaring her elbows, with an awkward bob of the head, which she had copied from her father. Then she turned and said to my uncle in tolerable English, 'My papa and mama are at the house; will you come to see them?' and then she led the way without another word. There was a low door in the wall at which Pauline stopped, pushing with her shoulder and giving a violent jerk.

'Allow me, mademoiselle. You will hurt yourself,' exclaimed Fontaine, quite shocked.

'Take care, my dear young lady,' said uncle Joseph; 'a small wedge inserted into the opening——'

But Pauline had burst open the door, and there was no more to be said. We all walked into the park, which was darkly overgrown, as French parks are apt to be, but

not without a certain dim charm of its own. Long vistas glimmered, and narrow avenues of trees ran in every direction. The great gates at the entrance of the chief avenue were half sunk into the earth; the ivies were clinging to the rusty hinges. The Court and its gay company had passed away, leaving it all to silence. For those who were to come after only a sign remained from the past generation to that which was to come—a stone with a herald's mark for us to note as we go by—some symbol of glories that are not quite over yet for impressionable people. And then we in turn hang up our trophies, names, and records, dumbly appealing for goodwill and sympathy to those who are to come after, and so we pass on our way.

Pauline walked first, swinging her arms, then followed my uncle and Fontaine of the springing step. The park led to an open space in front of the old house, and a terrace, upon which M. and Madame Fournier were seated enjoying the evening air. They had coffee-cups on the little green table between them. M. Fournier was in his shirt-sleeves, Madame Fournier's hair was neatly combed and arranged with many pins. She did not wear a cap, as do English matrons. She was like her daughter in appearance; but, although prettier, she had less expression. Neither she nor her husband troubled themselves about Henry IV. and his hunt. They put a large

billiard table in the hall, set a maid to darn stockings in a window, placed a green-baize-covered piano exactly in the centre of the drawing-room, saw that the floor was polished, so that Pauline could slide from one end to the other in her chaussons, and prepared to enjoy the fruits of their many years' labour in peace.

But there was still something to be done. Pauline, notwithstanding her short frocks, her scrambles, her tails of plaited hair, was eighteen, and of an age to marry. 'His daughter's establishment occupies Fournier very anxiously,' the Maire had already explained; several propositions have been made, but he has his own ideas. Mademoiselle Pauline herself as yet only thinks of running wild. Hers is a wonderful activity!'

'She inherits her activity from her papa,' Madame Fournier used to say. She was fat and lazy herself, and took her exercise chiefly in nodding from her chair; she would gladly have seen her daughter more like other girls, and used to protest placidly from the chimney corner, 'Would you believe it, Monsieur Fontaine, my daughter drags the roller unassisted for an hour a day! It is inconceivable.'

'Excellent gymnastics, mama,' says papa Fournier, cheerfully. 'Don't you interfere with our course of hygiene.'

Next time I walked up to the Château, I was amused to

meet Pauline actively occupied, as her mother had described, dragging a huge roller over the grass. The young lady stopped on seeing me coming, wiped her brow, and sent a gardener for a glass of beer, which she tossed off at a draught. Her manners were not attractive at first sight, but one got used to them by degrees, and very soon Pauline and I had struck up a girlish intimacy.

She was a kind and warm-hearted girl, gentle enough in reality, although she seemed so abrupt and determined at first. She was dogmatic and conceited; she had a habit of telling long and prosy stories all about her own exploits and wonderful penetration, but this was only want of habit of the world. Her confidence in others made her a bore, perhaps, but it made one love her too. She had plenty of sympathy and intelligence. She had never read any books, or known anybody outside the walls of her home. It was a lonely life that she had lived, with the garden-roller and her dogs for playfellows, roaming within the gloomy gates of the park, or among the black fields and creeping waters that surrounded it. But she was happy enough; she was free to come and go as she liked. The tranquil commonplace of home was made dear to her by her father's trusting love; even her mother's placid jealousy was part of it all.

'Before my brother died,' she said one day, 'mama did not mind little things as she does now. That was years ago—before I can remember. I am the only child,' she

said, with a sigh, 'and all their fortune is for me, they say. They have bought this big house for me; it is part of my *dot*; it was the de Mesnils' once.' Then she shrugged her broad shoulders. 'I shall be a great deal richer and in a much better position than Claudie de Mesnil, and yet I assure you Madame la Comtesse would scarcely allow her daughter to speak to me. She thinks people who are not noble are scarcely human beings. I am a good bourgeoise, and I am not ashamed of it. I might like aristocrats better if they were more like Monsieur Maurice,' said Pauline. 'That day his mother was rude, and sent her daughter away from me when I spoke to her, he looked really sorry, and came up to mama to try and make it up. I was nearly crying, but I would not let them see it. We had gone to offer that detestable woman the Château for the summer. She would not take it, so we left it shut up. Another year you might have it if you liked, and you must come and stay with me next week when your uncle goes back to Paris. You don't know me yet; but I know you, and I am sure we shall be good friends. Shake hands,' and she held out her hand. It was very red and broad, but its grasp was cordial. 'I will come and see you to-morrow, after breakfast. Is it true that Protestants fast every day but Sunday? I should not like that,' says Pauline, making a horrible face. 'I did not like the English till I knew you.' Here, I suppose, I flushed up.

'Good morning,' I said, very stiffly. 'I might say just the contrary. I *did* like the French until——'

'Nonsense. You like me very much,' said Pauline. 'I shall come and see you to-morrow, after our breakfast.'

I took my way along the canal, and she walked off under the trees, whistling and swinging her arms.

CHAPTER III.

AN INVENTORY.

I AFTERWARDS discovered that Pauline did these things a little out of bravado. She was not really vulgar, though she did vulgar things, and would swing her arms, rub her eyes, yawn in one's face in the most provoking manner at times. I have heard her exclaim, 'Ah! bah!' just as the peasants did down in the village. This was what she said when her father told her one day that an uncle of M. de Mesnil, an old bachelor living in Paris, had, upon some general expression of Monsieur Fournier's goodwill towards the young dispossessed proprietor of the Château, asked him pointblank what he would say in the event of Maurice de Mesnil coming forward as a suitor for the hand of Mademoiselle Fournier.

'There! that is just like you,' cried Madame Fournier, strangely flustered for her. 'You tell one this when it is too late; you never consult me, never say one word till the whole thing has blown over. Pauline, I don't know whether you or your father seems to me the most childish

and incapable. I have no doubt, M. Fournier, you never gave any answer at all!'

'I gave an answer,' said Fournier, gravely.

'Well!' said Madame Fournier, 'what did you say?'

Fournier shrugged his shoulders. 'It was absurd,' said he; 'that was what I said. If they had not been so unfortunate, I might have told them that their suggestion seemed an impertinence.'

'An impertinence, papa,' said Pauline. 'M. Maurice never would be impertinent. He knew nothing about it. I could not have believed you to be so prejudiced,' and she suddenly leaped over a little rail that happened to be in her way, and walked off. Madame Fournier looked after her. When Fournier spoke again, his wife answered him so shortly, that I thought it more discreet to leave the worthy couple to themselves. I could not find Pauline anywhere in the park, but on my way back to the house I met Fournier walking thoughtfully along with his hands in his pockets.

'Have you not found Pauline?' he asked. 'Has she run off? Are you not great friends, you two? My little Pauline!' he went on, speaking to himself; 'she is a treasure. Whoever wins her will have found a treasure. Her mother would have her different—a fine lady; not so would I. She is true and innocent and courageous, and tender to those who belong to her home. I am thankful to have so good a child.' And so he walked on.

Presently someone came up from behind and caught me round the neck with a sudden pair of arms.

'You never saw me, you little blind creature,' cries Pauline. 'I have been peeping at you from behind the bushes. You and papa looked so confidential, talking away together there! Come—he shall take us in the punt; that is a good bourgeois way of getting about. Don't you see him out there waiting down by the water-side?' And there, surely enough, stood Monsieur Fournier, looking abstractedly across the canal at the willow stumps opposite.

It was in the punt, as we were sliding along the waters, with the lovely autumn gold lighting the dark banks, with the green leaves floating on the water, and insects droning sleepily, and a sweet fragrance in the air, and a faint aroma of distant peat-fields, that M. Fournier said to his daughter, 'Tell me, Pauline, is your mother right? Would you like me to think seriously of young de Mesnil for your husband?'

'I like him very much, papa,' said Pauline, very composedly 'I would not wish to influence you or my mother, as I am sure you can judge far better than I can. But if you ask me my wishes, I should certainly be glad that you should consider M. de Mesnil's proposition.'

I opened my eyes in amazement. Was this—was this the way in which a maiden yielded her heart? Were they serious? They were quite serious, and went on dis-

cussing the subject until the boat ran aground. Then we had to clamber up the banks and run home in the twilight, under the trees.

When Pauline asked me to spend a fortnight with her after my uncle's return to Paris, I had gladly consented, for I was sincerely interested by my new friend. From some hints of Monsieur Fontaine's I had imagined that under the circumstances my presence might be thought out of place, but they assured me that I was welcome, and Madame Fournier kindly insisted.

'We are glad, Miss,' she said, 'that our Pauline should be cheered and distracted by the presence of one of her own age. You young people understand one another.' When it was thus decided that I should stay on with Pauline Fournier, the respite was very welcome to me. We had all been very happy in the little village, and not one of us but felt sorry that the time was come to leave it.

The good farmers' wives had welcomed us hospitably, the labouring women had grunted a greeting as they trudged home with their loads, so did their little children along the road; Jacques from the mill, Jean from the farm, were all our acquaintances—the laitière at her door, the friendly old grocers opposite the church.

Our lease had come to an end, and the house had to be given up to Madame Valmy, its rightful owner. A very grim-looking maid-servant came to receive the keys, and to take possession. All our own boxes and parcels were

carried out through the garden, and placed ready in the road for the little omnibus. It ran daily past our gate at ten o'clock, and caught the early train to Paris from Corbeil. My luggage, however, was kept distinct from the family penates, and was piled up on a wheelbarrow, for the gardener to convey to the Château in the course of the morning.

I do not think I have described the Pavilion, as our house was called, now standing empty in the sunshine awaiting the return of its owner. Madame Valmy had put up at the little inn for the night, and was not to come in till the following day; but this maid-servant, Julienne, as they called her, had appeared early in the morning to go over the inventory, and to receive the keys from me, the only survivor of our cheerful colony. Julienne was not a pleasant person to have to do with. She was stout and pale, with a heavy sulky face. She seemed constantly suspecting me of some sinister purpose as she walked over the house, counted the inventory, and asked for the rent. Monsieur Fontaine had the rent He had promised to get change for a cheque, and to bring the amount, but Julienne did not seem to believe me when I told her so.

The house stood at right angles between a garden and a courtyard; the drawing-room windows opened into the garden, the door of the house led to the courtyard; the courtyard opened into a side street of the village, so that there were two distinct entrances to the house. People

calling generally came through the court where the bell hung under a little tiled roof all to itself; but it was quite easy to open the garden gate if you knew the trick of the latch, and to come in by the drawing-room windows. An iron scrolled gateway, wreathed by a vine, divided the courtyard from the garden. This door was always locked, besides which the vine had travelled on and on and bound the hinges and the iron scrolls together. I was standing in the courtyard that morning still talking to Julienne and trying to divert her many suspicions, when some shadow fell upon me, and turning round I saw that someone was looking at me through the grating. It was the figure of a slim woman in a pink dress, with a very bright complexion. In one hand she held a green parasol. She laid her white fingers upon the lock. 'Madame, you know very well that there is no getting through that way,' said Julienne. The woman's voice was singularly rough and yet distinct. As she spoke the figure disappeared. I don't know what it was that impressed me so disagreeably in both maid and mistress. It is difficult not to believe in some atmosphere which strangers coming into a place often feel, although they may not always understand it.

Meanwhile Julienne went on with her investigations. 'Where are the chests off the landing?' said she. 'We put them out of the way,' I answered. 'You will find them in the little cellar off the dining-room.' The housekeeper was not satisfied until she had lighted a candle,

descended the three stone steps that led to the cellar, and examined the locks, to make sure they had not been tampered with. 'There is another cellar beyond,' said she, 'but it is full of good wine, and we did not give you the key.'

I was not sorry when Pauline interrupted our *tête-à-tête*; she had goodnaturedly come off to fetch me. 'Here you are, Miss,' she said, breathlessly. 'I have been to the station with papa. I saw your uncle and your cousins go off, and now you belong to me for ever so long;' and she took my hands in hers and shook them cordially. Her eyes looked very bright, and her hair very curly. 'Well, have you nearly done? can you come with me? How do you do? How is your mistress, Julienne, and when is the wedding to be?'

Julienne answered drily that she never asked questions, and that if people were curious they had better enquire for themselves. Pauline turned away, with the family shrug. 'The longer it is put off the better pleased I shall be,' she said. 'I can't imagine how she can think of him. The English are so ridiculous. I wouldn't marry an Englishman.'

I was little more than a schoolgirl, and my temper was already roused. 'I think it is very rude, and unkind, and inhospitable of you, if you are my friend, to talk in this dreadful way,' I cried, almost with tears in my eyes. 'The English are not ridiculous, they are a noble— —'

'Do you really mind what I say?' said Pauline, taking my hand. 'Please, my dear friend, forgive me,' and she looked at me full of concern, so that I was obliged to laugh.

Then, as soon as she had made sure I had forgiven her she walked out of the house. Pauline did not look round to see whether I had followed her out, she pushed open the door of the courtyard, and marched out into the street. She was very rude at times, and made me more angry than anybody else, but she was so kind and feeling too that I always forgave her. My own cousins were gay, gentle, friendly in manner; she was either quite silent, or she would talk by the hour. She was alternately dull and indifferent and boisterous in her mirth; she was by way of hating affectation, and of thinking everybody affected; in order to show how sincere she was, she seemed to go out of her way to invent rudenesses. She was not even pretty. She might have had a good complexion but for her freckles; a pretty smile and white teeth seemed to be her only attraction. As I have said, she generally wore an ill-made green frock, country shoes, and coarse knitted stockings. Till she was sixteen she had persisted in keeping her petticoats half up to her knees, with black stuff trousers, such as girls wore in those days, and a black stuff apron and sleeves to match.

'No,' said Pauline, again, 'I cannot think how my pretty delightful Madame Valmy can think of marrying

your Capitaine Thomsonne, or how she can keep that horrid Julienne in her service.'

As she spoke we were passing Fontaine's house, and his head appeared for one instant in a window; the next minute he had hurried into the road to greet us. 'Are you aware that Madame Valmy is come?' he said, in great excitement. 'I have just seen Le Capitaine, who seems a little suffering. But our fine air will set him up. I am immediately starting to pay my respects to Madame. I hope, Mademoiselle Pauline, with your leave, that our musical evenings at the Château will now recommence, the prima donna being among us once more. To-morrow I am engaged upon business for my friend Monsieur Mérard, but Thursday we might all combine, perhaps.'

'I will let you know,' said Pauline. 'We may be busy.' She spoke with some constraint. The Maire gave one rapid glance.

It is strange what a part in life the things play which never happen. We think of them and live for them, and they form a portion of our history, and while we are still absorbed in these imaginary dreams the realities of our lives meet us on the way, and we suddenly awaken to the truth at last. Pauline thought that her fate was being decided, and that by Thursday all secret destinies were to be unravelled; no wonder that she was silent as we walked along.

CHAPTER IV.

MADEMOISELLE PAULINE'S MARRIAGE PORTION.

When the Comte de Mesnil fell into that hopeless condition from which he never rallied, but sank after some months of illness, it was found that his affairs were in utter confusion. He had kept his difficulties secret even from his wife. It was impossible to tell whether this impending ruin had produced the mental disturbance from which he was suffering, or whether the ruin had not been partly owing to some secret want of balancing power; for his extravagance had been almost without a limit. The Countess had tried in the first years of their marriage to interfere; but for long past had forborne to blame her husband or to enquire into his affairs. She herself had drawn largely upon his resources. To do him justice, the Count was indifferent to money for its own sake, and had only been anxious that everyone should be as comfortable as circumstances might admit. Unfortunately one day came when circumstances no longer admitted of any comfort for anybody. The Count's creditors seized his great

house in Paris; the sheriff's officers were in possession; the whole magnificent apparatus of damask, and crystal, and china, was to be disposed of by public auction. And the unfortunate Countess, who was more difficult to dispose of, was sitting, silent, resentful, and offended beyond words or the power of words, in a temporary lodging which her son had taken for her use. She had a daughter also, an amiable and gentle girl, who tried in vain to console her, but Madame de Mesnil looked upon all attempts at consolation as insults. We have seen how she treated M. Fontaine. Maurice her son, now Comte de Mesnil in his own right, had suggested their all going into the country, and trying to live as economically as might be upon what might remain to them; but even this moderate scheme was not to be carried out. The estate at Visy remained, but there was scarcely anything left besides, and the only thing to be done was to sell that too, and to live upon the proceeds of the sale. The one piece of good fortune which befell this unfortunate family was the advent of a purchaser for the estate. This was our friend Fournier, who was willing to pay a fair price for the land and the old house upon it. He produced certain sums of money representing a great deal of good sense, hard work, and self-denial, and received in return the estate which the late Count's folly and self-indulgence had thrown into the market.

Maurice had several interviews with the old manufacturer—ventured to make one or two suggestions about

the management of the property, which had been very ill received by his late father, but which nevertheless were, in Fournier's opinion, worth considering. Something in the young Count's manner, his courtesy and simplicity of bearing, impressed the old man in his favour. Fournier thought himself no bad judge of character, and after that little talk with Pauline he made up his mind. He cared less for money than people do who have not earned it. It seemed to him that there were other things wanting besides money to make his girl happy in her marriage. 'This young fellow is clear-headed, modest, ready to occupy himself intelligently; he will make an excellent landlord. My wife has a fancy to see a countess's coronet on her daughter's pocket-handkerchief. Pauline might do worse,' he said to Fontaine. 'I am going to Paris to-morrow to speak to Maurice's uncle, the Baron. That is an old fox if you like, but I like the young man.'

'I have known Maurice from his childhood,' said Fontaine, solemnly (so he told me afterwards); 'he is a gallant man, incapable of a dishonourable action. I will answer for him with my word and——'

'Good, good, good,' says Fournier, who hated phrases. 'I daresay he is very like other people; it will be a good business for him. My Pauline, and my rent-roll, and my share in the factory—he will not make a bad bargain.'

It was on the very day I went up to stay at the house

that Fournier came back from Paris, having concluded this solemn affair.

We had been walking in the park, in silence, for Pauline seemed absent, and for once she did not care to go on with her usual somewhat long-winded histories. There is a little mound near the terrace from whence one can see the road winding between its poplars, the great fields lying one beyond the other, some golden with corn, others black with peat and with smoking heaps, of which the vapours drifted along the horizon. 'There is my father coming,' cried Pauline suddenly, and she started running along the avenue, and came up to M. Fournier just at the entrance gate by the poplar trees, of which all the shadows seemed to invite the passing wayfarers to come in and rest. I followed, running too, because Pauline ran. I am afraid it showed small discretion on my part.

'Well, Pauline,' said her father kindly, stopping to breathe. Then he turned to me. 'How do you do, Miss Mary? I am glad to see you as our guest.'

'Where have you been, papa; what have you been about?' Pauline said, after a minute of silence.

'I have had a hard day's work in your service,' he answered. 'I have been to call upon M. le Baron de Beaulieu, upon Madame la Comtesse de Mesnil,' said the father, stroking her cheek with his finger. 'I have been work-

ing for you, Mademoiselle. I hope it is all for the best,' he repeated with a sigh. 'M. Maurice seems a fine young fellow. I do not like the mother.'

'Don't you, papa?' said Pauline, absently; and she stooped and pulled up a handful of grass, which she then blew away into the air.

'To be Madame la Comtesse is small comfort where hearts are cold, and the home an empty lonely place,' said Fournier. 'Well, well, the young man is coming here as you wish. You must see him and make up your mind. I don't think he can ever learn how to love you, my child, as well as your old father does.' Fournier was very gentle and sad, and he went on swinging his stick, and said no more. I lingered behind and watched the father and daughter walk away together, up the avenue towards the house, trudging along side by side, looking strangely alike. When I came in Pauline was not to be seen. M. Fournier was sitting reading the paper in his usual corner. Madame Fournier met me on the stairs; I think she had been crying. She stopped me. 'Do not go to Pauline just yet,' she said; 'she is agitated, dear child—she —— we ——. Monsieur Fournier has decided. I have been very happy myself,' she added, with a tender look in her flushed red face; 'I should like my child to know such happiness. M. de Mesnil is coming here to-morrow.'

They were good and worthy people. I was glad to be with them.

I was happy enough up at the Château, but I could imagine that for a young man it might seem rather monotonous at times. Maurice used to think it almost unbearably so in his father's time, and secretly hated the place. One cannot reason out every motive which prompts each human action. Sufficient be it if the sum, on the whole, drives the impulse rightly. Perhaps it had been no great sacrifice to the young man to hear that the cruel fates had exiled him from this dreary, familiar, wearisome old home, and that he was to return thither no more. Long after he confessed everything to Pauline; and the dismay he felt when his mother sent for him, and with happy agitation told him of the wonderful chance by which, if he was so inclined, the old home might return to its ancient possessors, to the owners whose right she still considered greater than that of mere purchase. As Maurice heard for the first time of Fournier's suggestion and his uncle's acquiescence, his heart only sank lower and lower; his mother's delight and eager exclamations sounded like a knell to his hopes. 'And now, now,' cried the poor lady, exulting, 'I shall not die with the bitter pang in my heart that your father's was the hand which exiled my son from the home to which he had a right; now,' she said, 'my life will close peacefully, reassured for my children's fate. My daughter need not fear the future. Your home will be hers at my death. I have not deserved so much; it makes up to me for my life of anxious sorrow.'

said the poor lady, bursting into tears, and covering her face with her hands. Poor Maurice knew not how to answer. His heart went on sinking and sinking; it had leapt up at the prospect of liberty, of hard work, of change, of independence. He had behaved very well; but he had been doing as he liked for the first time in all his life, and now more firmly than ever did the fetters seem rivetted which were to bind him down to Visy. Its black canals seemed to rise and rise and choke him; the dreary old gables seemed to weigh upon his very soul. For a few moments he stood silent, making up his mind. He was trying to frame the sentence by which to explain to his mother what he felt.

'There is much to be considered,' he was beginning. Then she raised her head; her entreating eyes met his, she put up her thin hands.

'Oh, my son!' she said. 'Do you think I sacrifice nothing when I give you up to strangers, that my mother's pride does not suffer at the thought of this cruel necessity? My Maurice, you have been my consolation and my courage; and oh, believe me, my son, you will never regret the impulse which makes you yield to your mother's prayer. Think what my life has been, think of the sorrows I have hidden from my children. Ah! do not condemn me to that renewed penance; I have no more strength for it.' She put her arms round his neck with tender persistence. Her wasted looks, her tears, and above all

her tenderness, which he had so often longed for as a child, and which had been so rarely expressed, overcame the poor kind-hearted young fellow's faint effort at resistance. He turned very pale, his lips seemed quite dry and parched, and something seemed to impede his speech as he said, 'Very well. Since you wish it, I will consent. The sooner it is all settled the better, I suppose.' He shook off little Claudine, who came coaxing up to him with innocent congratulations. He scarcely answered his uncle's long speeches and elaborations, when the Baron arrived in his black satin stock, prepared to undertake any necessary negotiations. Three days later, Maurice went down to Visy. From a French point of view, the whole thing was a highly desirable and honourable proceeding. M. le Comte de Mesnil arrived in a dogged and determined state of mind, prepared to go through with the dreary farce.

CHAPTER V.

MADEMOISELLE PAULINE'S INTENDED HUSBAND.

It must have seemed like a sort of mockery to poor Maurice to see the familiar chairs in the hall, to hear the well-known tick of the old clock in the great salon, and to be solemnly announced to the company assembled at the Château—M. Fournier, Madame Fournier, Pauline with her Sunday frock, and Fontaine the friend of the family, who had been invited to break the formality of this first introduction. M. de Mesnil was a youth of the usual type, with honest grey eyes, not unlike Pauline's. He was pale, slight, distinguished in manner and appearance —a contrast to the worthy master of the house, in which M. Fournier certainly seemed to me very much out of place. Pauline looked very pale, too, very clumsy, but noble, somehow, notwithstanding her plaid frock and her twists. Maurice was perfectly quiet and conventional, bowed with his hat in his hand, expressed his gratitude for the invitation he had received, sat down in a company attitude upon the old armchair against which he had so often knocked his nose as a child. He took Madame

Fournier into dinner, Pauline sat on his other hand. They had a melon, soup, sweetbreads, a gigot, with a plated handle to carve it by; a round tart, cream-cheese, and champagne for dessert. 'The dinner was excellent; but Maurice certainly did not distinguish himself,' the Maire observed. 'I did my best, but conversation languished.'

For the first few days M. de Mesnil was busy with his father-in-law going over the estate and the business connected with it, and while he had work to do, Maurice seemed comparatively resigned; but when, on the third morning, M. Fournier told him to go in and make himself agreeable to his wife and daughter, Maurice felt the old dismay return tenfold. He had little in common with the ladies. He might respect Pauline, but he was certainly afraid of her; and as for making himself agreeable, nothing seemed left for him to do but wander vapidly about from one room to another, or to saunter along the terrace with Pauline and with Madame Fournier, who conscientiously and laboriously chaperoned the couple. One day I found him yawning in the hall, and watching the darning of stockings. Another day he assisted Pauline with the garden-roller. Pauline was a curiously determined person. She would not give up one of her pursuits for any number of aspirants. 'Let them come, too,' said she, 'if they want to see me.' Some horrible dulness overpowered Maurice; a nightmare seemed to be upon the place, and

Pauline was only a part of it, and so was everything else. Formerly he used to have schemes for benefiting the tenants, now he no longer wished to benefit anybody. Once he had imagined that want of funds prevented his efforts—now it was some strange inability to do and care and to interest himself which had come over him: they had taken his liberty away, condemned him to a life he was weary of. He did not care what happened.

He took us out in a punt one day; and I remember when we ran aground it was Pauline, not Maurice, who sprang into the water and pushed us off.

Madame Fournier screamed. M. Fournier only laughed. Pauline, shaking her wet clothes, said it was nothing. However, she conceded something to de Mesnil's well-bred concern, and went back to the house to change her wet things. Maurice would have accompanied her, but his father-in-law called him back.

'Let her be, let her be! She will be quicker without you. We shall meet her at the little bridge.' Then we went on our way again in the punt, rather a silent party.

'That naughty child!' said Madame Fournier. 'She will get some frightful illness one day if she is not more careful. I am glad you persuaded her to change her wet clothes, M. Maurice. She would not have done it for me.'

'In my time,' said old Fournier, 'it was the young men, not the young women, who jumped into the water.

You have certainly not brought your daughter up to think of the *bienséances*, Louise.'

'It is not my doing, Monsieur Fournier,' said his wife, reddening. 'You would never allow me to hold her back. How many times have I not——-'

'Good, good, good!' cries M. Fournier, in his irritated voice. 'This is the hundredth time you tell me all this.'

I saw Maurice bite his lip while this discussion was going on. He did not speak; he continued to work the long pole by which we were shoved along; the boat steadily progressed, rounded the point, came out into a sudden glow of light, air, sunshine. There was the bridge, there was a sight of the old house with its many windows. Three figures were standing by the bridge. Pauline herself, still in her wet clothes, a short little gentleman with a moustache, and a tall lady waving a green parasol.

'Who is it?' says Fournier, blinking.

'Why, here is Madame Valmy.' cried Madame Fournier, quite pleased, and bristling up with conscious maternal excitement at the news she had to give. 'And Pauline——'

Mademoiselle Fournier turned and nodded to us. She was wet, soiled, splashed from head to foot. She was talking eagerly to the friends she had encountered, to the flourishing little gentleman, to the elegant lady, curled, trimmed, cool, in perfect order, who seemed to me to give a sarcastic little glance every now and then at poor

Pauline's drenched garments. Fournier called out very angrily again, why had she waited, why had she not gone home?

'I am going, papa. They did not know the way,' shouted Pauline. And she set off, running and swinging her arms as she went along. Then Fournier, rather reluctantly I thought, greeted his guests. Madame Valmy was invited into the punt by Madame Fournier.

'Get in, if you like,' said Fournier. 'There will be room enough. You can take my place. I will show the captain my new hydraulic pump, if he will walk across with me to the stables.'

It was a curious change of atmosphere when, with a rustle and a gentle half-toned laugh, Madame Valmy stepped into the broad boat, and settled herself down beside me. I saw Maurice looking at her with some surprise. She was smiling. To-day she wore a blue gown, and falling muslin sleeves and ruffles. She held her ivory parasol daintily in one mittened hand; she laughed, talked, seemed at once to become one with us all. It was certainly a great relief to the poor young Count to meet this fascinating, agreeable, fashionable person in his somewhat wearisome Arcadia. His eyes brightened, some change came over him; and Madame Sidonie herself, as she liked to be called, appeared greatly interested by the melancholy, pale, romantic looks of M. de Mesnil. She opened her eyes, seemed to understand

everything in a minute, and I could read her amused surprise that Pauline, of all people in the world, should have discovered such a husband. Nothing would content Madame Fournier but that Madame Valmy should return to the Château with us. The two gentlemen were pacing the terrace and tranquilly discussing pumps. Pauline came to meet us along the avenue, and all the fragrant darkness seemed to me like a tide rising among the stems of the trees. The house-door was open wide. The hall was lighted with two oil lamps; a tray with various cordials and glasses stood on the billiard-table.

'Come in and rest,' said Pauline. 'Won't you have some beer, instead of all this?'

Madame Valmy laughed and shrank back; Pauline tossed off a glass; and Fontaine now appeared from within; he had been tuning his fiddle in the drawing-room, and the candles were already lighted on the piano.

Although Madame Valmy refused the beer, she accepted a glass of chartreuse, and then consented to open the concert, and to sit down at the piano, and to sing a romance which made Maurice thrill again. It was something about—

> Je suis triste—je voudrais mou-ri-re,
> Car j'ai perdue—ue, mon ami,
> La la la la li-re.

When she had finished, M. le Maire accompanied Mademoiselle Fournier on his violin all through an im-

mensely long piece of music, so difficult that he declared no amateur would ever be able to master it, and during the performance of which the Intended was busy paying compliments and whispering remarks to the songstress. My attention wandered away to the two as they sat on the big couch by the window, while the Maire went on from one agonising passage to another, beating time with his foot, running frantic scales, and poor Pauline, with her elbows squared, was banging away at the piano, and rumbling in the bass so as to imitate thunder. She had put on a dress with two frills sticking up on the shoulders. Her mouth was open, her eyes fixed on her music, her tight bronze shoes hard at work at the pedals. Madame Fournier was in her chair delightedly nodding time. M. Fournier in the distance reading the paper by the light of a lamp with a green shade. M. de Mesnil looked away from his bride and her surroundings to the charming lady who was glancing so archly at him over her waving fan. No wonder if he sighed and thought, perhaps, that honest Pauline was not exactly the idea which a young man would dream of at his start in life—the sympathetic being who, &c. &c. &c. But meanwhile squeak-eak goes the fiddle, bang, rumble, bang goes Pauline, and Sidonie Valmy's deep eyes are glancing, her glittering fan waves faintly, her silence says a thousand things, her smiles sing siren songs, and the foolish young man is sinking, sinking, head over ears in the deep water.

CHAPTER VI.

MADAME VALMY.

After all these romances and minor chords, my conversation with Madame Valmy that night before she went home seemed rather a come down to commonplace again. She came up very graciously to speak to me as I sat in my corner. She seemed in high spirits, with pink cheeks blushing.

'I am now at home, and I have to thank your uncle for the rent which he left with M. Fontaine,' she said. 'My maid, Julienne, who is very difficult to please, tells me that your servants have left everything in excellent condition. She begged me to ask,' said Madame, with a charming smile, 'if you happened to know anything of the key of the door to the recess in the dining-room. We keep our provisions there, the place is so cool and dark—I am giving so much trouble, but Julienne is dreadfully particular. . . .'

De Mesnil prepared to walk home with our visitors across the park. Pauline said she should also like to accompany them. It was quite dark, but she came back alone whistling and calling to her dog.

'I sent him on to the village, mama,' she said, in answer to Madame Fournier's glance. She took my hand and held it tight in hers as she spoke, and pulled me to a window. She stood there leaning her head against the pane; it was unshuttered, and the dark night was black outside. She was thinking of many things, her heart was full and she wanted to speak; she suddenly began in a low moved voice. 'Ah!' she said, 'what a great responsibility is another person's happiness! How do I know that I can make him happy? Of what use would it be to me to be Madame la Comtesse? Of what use would the park, and all the trees, and the houses and furniture, and all my money, be to M. Maurice if he was not happy? I am foolish,' she said. 'I don't know what I want. Mama had only seen my father once when she agreed to marry him. Maurice is so different. His habits are not like mine. Oh I could not, could not bear it, if I thought he was unhappy with me. But my father and mother must know better than I can do. They have judged wisely for me in their tender affection, and I can abide by their decision.' As she spoke, she looked across the long room at her mother placidly napping in her chair, at her father in his black velvet cap reading his paper by lamp-light, then she

threw open the pane for a minute, but her father called to her to close it.

'Do you see him coming?' said Pauline. 'Don't go. Shall we wait here a little bit?'

We waited a very long time, but Maurice did not come. It was not till I was undressed that I heard the hall-door unbarred, and M. Fournier's voice as he let the young man in.

It was a hot sultry night, and I could not sleep. I went to the window of my room, which looked out at the back of the house into the park. A sort of almost supernatural sweetness seemed brooding from the vaguely illumined sky, where one great dewy planet hung sparkling. The other stars were dimmed by this wonderful radiance. The cattle were out in the dark fields beyond the trees, and from time to time I heard them lowing. The sound came distinct, and sounded melodious, somehow, and reassuring. Everything was still and very hot. Strange vaporous things whirled past me in the darkness. Moths beat their gauzy sails. Was it a bat's wing that flapped across the beautiful star, as I leant from the window, breathing in the flagrant perfume of some creeper that was nailed against the wall? I could see a line of light from Pauline's window, shooting out into the darkness. Then I saw, vaguely at first, and then more distinctly, some shadowy movement among the flower-beds at the end of the paved terrace. Then the shadow seemed to

gain in substance and form, and the sound of slow falling footsteps reached me. I was only a girl, and superstitious still in those days, and for a moment my heart beat fast. But almost immediately I recognised something familiar in the movement which told me that it was the very substantial figure of M. Fournier that was wandering in and out and round and about the little flower-beds. It seemed to me a strange proceeding on his part, for it was not the beauty of the night which attracted him. As he passed my window, he seemed to me muttering angrily to himself. 'Que diable!' I heard him say. Then I went to sleep, and awoke with a start, still listening to the wandering footsteps. After all his talk about early hours, here was M. Fournier himself restlessly pacing the night away.

Captain Thompson was very much occupied just about this time. He was winding up some affairs connected with another peat factory which he had started at Estournelles. He used to be absent all day, and only came in late in time for dinner. He was not there to turn over Madame Valmy's pages as she sat at her piano on the hot autumnal afternoons, but somehow de Mesnil was always ready to do her errands, or to wait her orders. Pauline was not a severe taskmistress, and never attempted to keep him by her side when he wished to go.

Monsieur Fontaine, who did not deny having been himself very much attracted by the lovely widow, shook

his head solemnly, and disapproved exceedingly of her flirtation with Maurice de Mesnil. Rarer and rarer were the accompaniments his fiddle scraped to Madame Valmy's love ditties, but the songstress somehow trilled on. Day after day de Mesnil would come sauntering down the street, and stop and go in at the gateway of the Pavilion, and the performance would presently begin, and the music would come floating across the court.

Pauline herself was an odd mixture of simplicity and shrewdness, and she went about loudly professing her admiration for the son-in-law her father had chosen. De Mesnil's refinement, his gentleness, impressed the brusque young bourgeoise with a certain shy admiring respect. She declared that he was too good for her, that he was throwing himself away; that she expected some obstacle must intervene. She was a girl of singular frankness—she never said a word that was not truth itself. She hated exaggeration; she had no sense of humour; her frankness was sometimes objectionable, her remarks stupid and ill-timed, and yet, in common with all conscientious persons, there was a certain force of character about her which impressed those who came in contact with her. Her mother always succumbed in the long run; her father, from whom she inherited this turn of mind, generally ended by giving in to her wishes.

It was not to be supposed that if Fontaine's eyes were open hers were closed, and that if the Maire had

commented upon what was passing she too did not suffer some natural pangs of jealousy.

Fontaine thought it his duty to speak to M. Fournier on the subject—so he told me confidentially; but the retired manufacturer stopped him at once. 'I have of course remarked that woman's machinations, but I have promised Pauline not to interfere for the present,' said he; 'I can trust her good sense. You will be helping me most effectually by saying no more on this subject to me or to anyone else.'

'Of course I can only respect his wishes,' said Fontaine; and so I told Mademoiselle Pauline, and so M. Fontaine told me whenever an opportunity occurred. All Englishmen, he said, knew the world. Needless to say, I was greatly flattered by this encomium.

The key of the closet opening out of the dining-room, which Madame Valmy had asked me for, was not to be found, my cousin wrote, and Pauline and I went one day to the village locksmith, and ordered another in its place.

'Madame Valmy's Julienne has already been here to tell me to make one,' said Leroux, the locksmith. 'She desired me to send you the account.'

Madame Coqueau, the locksmith's mother-in-law, who was the village newsmonger, here chimed in. 'The Captain's cider and champagne had arrived,' she said; 'no wonder they were in want of a key; and that Julienne,

for all her grim airs, was as fond of a bottle of good wine as others with half her pretensions.'

Madame Coqueau evidently shared my dislike to Julienne. She was prepared to enlarge upon her reasons, but Pauline and I said good-bye abruptly. We were walking home leisurely up the street, chattering and looking about; I had just asked where Captain Thompson was living, when we passed a low white house, covered with a trellis.

'This is his house; he will stay there till after the marriage, then he goes to the Pavilion,' said Pauline.

Then we came to the gates of the Pavilion, which were open, for Captain Thompson was crossing the courtyard from the house. He was looking very smiling and trim as usual. He took off his hat when he saw us, stopped, and came up to Pauline, saying—

'I was just going in search of a good-natured person, mademoiselle. Would you consent to do me a favour? Fongtaine has been drawing up a paper for me. Madame Valmy—Sidonie can't sign, because she is concerned in it. We want someone to witness my signature, and if you young ladies would be so kind as to come in for one minute, everything would be en reggel. This is very good of you,' as he stood by to let us pass. We went up the steps and past the kitchen. Julienne was standing at the door with a saucepan in her hand. Pauline said 'Good morning,' but Julienne did not answer. She looked as if

she would have liked to throw her saucepan at our heads. I could not imagine what we had done to vex her.

'You must not mind her,' said Captain Thompson, as we came into the dining-room. 'She is in one of her ill-humours. Only Sidonie, who is sweetness itself, would put up with her. She is rude to everyone. She positively refused to witness for us just now, and that is why I have to trouble you, ladies.' Then he opened the drawing-room door and ushered us in. Sidonie, in her sweetest temper and blue trimmings, was installed in her big soft chair by the window. She seemed unprepared for our appearance, but her embarrassment did not last.

'Well, Sid! here are some witnesses,' said the Captain; 'now we shall get the business settled.'

A huge foolscap lay on the table, emblazoned in Gothic letters with 'Will of Captain J. Beauvoir Thompson, of Amphlett Hall, Lancaster.' M. Fontaine was writing something at a side-table. He waved his hand to us and went on.

Captain Thompson went up and read over Fontaine's shoulder, while I looked round in some surprise. Was this the room we had lived in for so many months? It seemed transformed into some strange place. The furniture was differently arranged, dark blinds had been put up in the windows, mirrors hung from the walls; bonbon boxes, footstools were scattered all about, huge japan pots stood on the chimney; some sense of enclosure had come

over the place; there was a faint scent of patchouli, a log was smouldering in the grate. The homely country fragrance of the vines and the garden-beds had pleased me better on the whole.

'There,' said the Captain, as Fontaine finished. 'Thank you, Fongtaine; and now, in case of anything happening to me between this and the weddin', I shall feel sure that you won't be put upon, my poor little woman.' He walked across to where Madame Valmy was sitting.

She did not notice him at first. 'Why do you persist in dwelling upon such dreadful thoughts?' said she, starting up suddenly with a glance at Pauline; 'why trouble yourself about me; I should manage somehow, anyhow, as I did before I knew you. What should I want else if I had not my foolish, foolish——'

Here she pulled out her handkerchief.

'There, there, don't cry, dear; it is all nonsense,' said he. 'You get anxious, you silly child,' and his voice softened. 'Why, it was something you said yourself last night which put it all into my head. It is only a fancy. I shan't die any the sooner for writing my name upon a piece of paper.'

As he walked back to the table, the door opened and Julienne looked in. He was deliberately writing his name with a flourish; Madame Valmy was watching him, and I, looking up, saw Julienne's strange eyes reflected in the

glass. Then Pauline witnessed the signature; and as she, too, suddenly met this strange fixed glance, she turned pale.

'What is it, Julienne?' said she. 'Why do you look at me like that?'

Julienne gave no answer, but walked away.

Madame Valmy began to laugh, rather hysterically. 'I don't know what is the matter with Julienne,' said she; 'she seems to have a horror of business. I myself am rather interested by it.'

'Business! Sid thinks she understands about business!' said the Captain, fondly. 'Shall I tell Fongtaine what a confusion you had got into, poor child, when you first consulted me? Think of her trying to speculate at the Bourse.'

Madame Valmy, with burning cheeks, was evidently vexed by the conversation, and the good Captain saw this, and became serious at once.

'Thank'ee, thank'ee,' he said, folding up the slips and putting them neatly away in his despatch-box.

The incident was slight enough, but it made an impression on me. I remembered his kind look afterwards.

'You English,' said Fontaine, gathering up his hat and gloves; 'you are a generous, impulsive race. I am sure, M. le Capitaine, that Madame Valmy must be touched by your care for her.'

'Nonsense, nonsense,' said the Captain. 'Sid makes a

great deal out of nothing. Now then, Julienne and I are going to put by the cider. I believe that is the real secret of her impatience this morning. Good-bye, thank you,' he repeated.

Madame also accompanied us to the door, waving farewells. She embraced Pauline, who seemed to me less demonstrative than she had usually been to her friend. She did not say a single word as we walked away. At the end of the village street, by the church, we met Maurice walking down.

'Were you coming to meet us?' Pauline asked, brightening up when she saw him.

He looked at her gravely, and said, 'No, I was not, but I will walk back with you if you will allow me.'

He and Pauline went first; I followed. I could not help, as I went along, speculating about Madame Valmy and her feeling for the Captain. It seemed to me that it was *Fontaine* who had been touched by the Captain's affection for Madame Valmy, far more than that lady herself, for she certainly was not crying when she pulled out her handkerchief.

CHAPTER VII.

COFFEE.

English Parisians are a curious race of willing exiles from their own country. I remember that I and my companions as girls used to feel an odd isolation at times and shame for our expatriation. We used to hang up our youthful harps by the waters of Babylon and lament our captivity, and think with longing of the green pastures and still waters of our native land. Older people feel things differently. Captain Thompson for one was never so well pleased as when anybody mistook him and his paddings and his blue boots for a Frenchman. He was respected in his own country; he was the master of a pretty home there and a comfortable estate; but his dream was to live abroad, and to be ordered about by this widow. He would have changed his name, and his nationality, if he could, as he did his clothes, and all his habits, soon after making Madame Valmy's acquaintance. After he knew her, time and space were not, except indeed so far as they concerned her and her wishes. For two years he had lived in her presence; he had taught himself French, which he

spoke with wonderful fluency and an inaccuracy which was almost heroic. Madame Valmy used to stop her pretty little ears at times; the Captain would blush, try to correct himself good-humouredly, and go on again, after gallantly kissing her fair hand by way of making peace. Of his devotion to her there was little doubt; her feelings for him used often to puzzle me. She seemed to avoid his company, to be bored by him; to accept his devotion, his care, his romance, with weariness and impatience. I have seen a doubtful look in his honest round face at times, and then at a word from her, some friendly little sign, he would brighten up again.

Little girls who are not yet of an age to be engrossed in conversation or in their own affairs are more observant than people imagine, and although Pauline praised Madame Valmy from morning to night, I never heartily responded. She was white, she was pink, she was exquisitely dressed, she was kind, her eyes were blue under her thick fair eyebrows; but it seemed to me that her kindness, her grace, her soft colours, were not the spontaneous outcomings of a gentle heart, but the deliberate exertion of her wish to please, to seem charming to certain persons for purposes of her own. It seemed to me that she was stupid, and with all her cleverness devoid of imagination. I remember once seeing her push a toddling child out of her way into the gutter; the little thing fell and began to cry; Madame Valmy walked quietly on, scarcely glancing

to see whether the baby was hurt. It was Monsieur Fontaine, who happened to be on his doorstep, who came down, picked the child up, and gave it a sugar-plum, and wiped its face with his bandanna handkerchief.

Madame Valmy had been spoiled all her life, by fortune, by misfortune, by trouble of every kind. She had married to escape a miserable home, but she married a rough and jealous and brutal man, whom she had never loved, and his cruelty roused all that was worst in her nature. Madame Valmy seemed to be utterly without the gift of conscience. Some people are said not to have souls—at least that is the only way in which I can account for events which came to my knowledge afterwards, and which never seemed to me quite satisfactorily explained away. Sometimes I believe for a minute some vague vision of better things than her own warmth and ease and greed and need for admiration would come before her, but these visions were only passing ones; at the first nip of cold, the first effort of self-restraint, this weak, stubborn, reckless creature forgot everything but her own grasping wishes—to be first, to be rich, envied, admired, to dazzle and eclipse all other women, to fascinate every man within her reach, to go to heaven charming M. le Curé and M. le Vicaire by the way—I can hardly tell what she hoped and what she did not hope. She was not grateful, for she took everything as her due, while she had the bitter resentments of a person who over-estimates her own consequence; but with all this

her manner was so charming, so gentle and sprightly, her laughter was so sympathetic, her allusions to her past sufferings so natural and so simple, that most people were utterly convinced by her. Madame Fournier and Pauline both thought there was no one like their pretty, poor, ill-used Madame Valmy. Fournier mistrusted her, but Fontaine would have gone to the farthest end of his Commune for her, and as for our compatriot Captain Thompson, he was over head and ears in love with her, and considered himself engaged to the sweetest angel in the world.

He had first known her at Visy in her husband's lifetime; it was from Valmy that he had bought his land and the little house in the village which he still inhabited. Captain Thompson never spoke of those days. I have seen him turn quite pale when Fontaine made any allusion to the time when they first met. Fontaine was less sensitive, and used to give us dark hints of Madame Valmy's history. I remember one evening, as we were all strolling across the fields in the sunset, that Fontaine was discoursing about the Valmy *ménage* and stove in his dining-room.

'It is six years since it was put up,' said he. 'I remember that the only civility the late M. Valmy ever showed me was at that time. He came to see it fixed and gave me several very useful hints.'

'M. Valmy! You knew him then. What sort of man was he?' said Madame Fournier.

'That would not be very easy to tell you,' said Fontaine. 'He was a man of military carriage, bronze complexion, a black, penetrating eye, a taciturn disposition. You may have heard how he locked himself up, and his wife too for the matter of that. They say he once kept her for a whole month in one of those little cells out of the dining-room.'

'Who says so?' cried a voice at our shoulder. What a horror! It was Pauline who had joined us.

'Ah, mademoiselle!' said Fontaine; 'excuse my starting—in reply to your question,' and he lowered his voice, 'Madame Coqueau mentioned the circumstance to me. She lived next door at the time, and she heard it from a servant who was soon afterwards dismissed.'

'I don't believe it,' said Pauline. 'M. Fontaine, you should not repeat such things. You know what an old gossip Madame Coqueau is.' All the same I saw Pauline watching Madame Valmy that evening with strange looks of pity. Well, her troubles were over for the present. Captain Thompson seemed to be of quite a different temperament from his predecessor, and his one regret was that there were not more families in the neighbourhood with whom there was any possibility of intimacy. The retired pastrycook in the house near the church was scarcely an associate for educated people; the doctor was a stupid little being, born in the village, and with but two ideas in his head. One was that Madame Coqueau should

look kindly on his suit, and join her fortune and her cows to his practice; the other idea was that an 'infusion de thé' was a specific for every malady.

On this particular evening, as we walked through the village, Madame Valmy began to ask us all in, to drink coffee in her garden.

'It is absurd,' said she, 'of me to invite you down from your pleasant terrace to my little parterre, but, as you are here, if you will come in, the Captain shall make the coffee. Nobody understands the art so well as he does. Even Julienne admits his superiority.'

As she spoke she led the way and we all followed one by one. We came in across the court-yard, passed through the house and out into the garden again, where a table was ready laid, and some chairs were set out. Julienne, looking as black as usual, and not prepared to admit anybody's superiority, came and went with coffee-cups and plates of biscuit and cakes, clanking her wooden shoes. The sky was ablaze, and so were the Michaelmas daisies in Madame Valmy's flower-beds. They seemed burning with most sweet and dazzling colour. A glow of autumn spread over the walls and the vines, and out beyond the grated door that looked upon the road and the stubble-fields.

As I sat there I looked back into the comfortable house through the drawing-room windows. M. Fontaine's dark innuendoes seemed utterly out of place amid so much elegant comfort. How impossible crime and sorrow seem

when the skies are peacefully burning, when the evil and the good are alike resting and enjoying the moment of tranquil ease! The Captain may have been enjoying himself, but he was not resting. He came and went, puffing and hospitable, with a huge coffee-pot, from which he filled our cups.

'Prengar, mon fille,' he said to the maid-servant, over whom he nearly tumbled once, coffee-pot and all, in his eagerness to serve us. Pauline put out her hand—one of the small tables went over; Madame Valmy gave a little scream of annoyance, the hot milk was spilt over her pale azure dress.

'Sidonie! my dear Sidonie, are you hurt?' cried he.

She laughed, but it was an angry laugh. 'I am not in the least hurt, it is nothing,' she said. 'You have only spoilt my dress, you or whoever it was,' and the gleam of her blue eyes seemed to say, Pauline, you have done it on purpose. 'Here, Julienne! bring a handkerchief,' she said; 'there is one in my work-basket.'

'I know, I saw it there,' cried Maurice, eagerly jumping up and running into the house.

I thought Pauline looked a little surprised that Maurice should be so much at home at the Pavilion as to know the contents of Madame Valmy's work-basket. She said nothing. Madame Fournier stared at the young man when he came back, and if Fontaine had not started some discussion about the length of time that coffee should be

allowed to boil, I think we should none of us have spoken. Presently Fournier put his untasted cup down on the table, and looked up at the evening star which was twinkling over the garden wall.

'It is getting cold,' he said. 'My rheumatism will not let me sit still here any longer. Pauline, will you come for a walk?' said he. 'I will go anywhere you like, so long as it is not in the direction of Estournelles.'

'Papa!' cried Pauline, 'that is exactly where I want to go.'

'Estournelles, is that where they are dancing?' said Maurice; 'why should we not go? The Captain shall dance, and so will I, and here is our agile friend Fontaine,' he added, laughing.

'I would go four miles to get out of their way,' said Monsieur Fournier, impatiently.

It is all very well for people who have danced for years and years to all manner of tunes and jigs until they are tired, to walk away quietly. Pauline and I were young enough to feel our hearts beat more quickly when we heard the scraping of fiddlestrings; our limbs seemed to keep some secret time to the call of these homely instruments (how many measures are there not to which one would fain keep time while life endures!) Some melancholy strain had been sounding in Pauline's ears as she sat among Madame Valmy's gay flower-beds. The thought of the peasants' dance at Estournelles came to her, I could

plainly see, as a distraction, a means of escape from oppressing thoughts.

'Dear papa,' said she, 'let us go; take mamma home. Maurice is here, he and Monsieur Fontaine will see us back.'

'And I may be allowed surely to chaperon the young ladies. They would enjoy the dance of all things,' said Madame Valmy, recovering her temper.

But Madame Fournier objected, as any properly-educated French mother would be sure to do. Pauline must not be seen in public without her. What was Madame Valmy thinking of? To everybody's amazement Madame Fournier actually proposed to walk another mile to the dancing-place. 'M. Fournier, *thou* wilt send back the carriage to fetch us,' said she, decisively. 'Tell Jean to wait for us at the corner of the road by the Captain's new shed.'

'Ah, yes, the machine is not working at this hour,' said Fontaine, 'or else it is hardly the place where I would recommend your coachman to wait with his horses.'

It was settled. Fournier marched off alone to his evening paper. The rest of us started in couples and triples across the fields. I was surprised to notice Madame Valmy's childish excitement. She was nodding and wriggling in a sort of exaggeration of her usual ways. Pauline plodded alongside. The Maire had offered his

arm to Madame Fournier, who had tied her handkerchief under her chin.

'Allow me to compliment you upon this extremely becoming toilette,' I heard Fontaine saying to the lady of the Château. 'Sprigs upon a white ground are always in good taste.'

Captain Thompson was still ruminating upon the accident. 'Spilt milk. There's a proverb about spilt milk. It was a mercy her arm wasn't burnt, she would not have been able to come this evening. I don't know if you young ladies mean to dance. I think I shall take a turn myself if I can find anyone to take pity on me. You may well look surprised, Miss Mary. But I don't know how it is,' said the little man, 'though I'm a middle-aged man, yet I feel as if I were a boy again. I have been very fortunate, I have had better luck than I deserve all my life, and now this sweet angel has taken pity on me and consents to take me under her wing. No wonder I feel young.'

CHAPTER VIII.

A COUNTRY DANCE.

A PEASANTS' dance is always a pretty, half-merry, half-melancholy festivity to persons looking on. The open air, the rustle of trees, the mingled daylight and darkness, the freshness, the roughness, the odd jingling of the country music, the rustic rhythm of the dancers; the country people coming across fields and skirting the high roads; some feeling of the long years of hard work before them, of their daily toil intermitted; the echoes sounding across the darkening landscape—all these things touch one with some strange feeling of sympathy and compassion for the merry-makers. We were bound to a certain open green at Estournelles where the villagers used to meet and dance on Sundays after church, while the elders looked on, smoked their pipes, and made their comments to the merry jigging and jingling of their children's pleasures. The refreshments were simple enough, and consisted of a little beer, a few cakes, or pears, baked in the country ovens, and set upon a wooden board under a tree. The music was made by a boy blowing on a pipe, an old man scraping a fiddle,

sometimes on grand occasions such as this a second fiddle was forthcoming, with an occasional chorus of voices from the people dancing. When the grand ladies and gentlemen from the houses all round about came to look on, the voices would be shy and hushed for a time. But soon the restraint would wear off; the dancers, carried away by the motion and the exhilaration of all this bouncing and swinging, would burst out anew; sometimes the fine people themselves would be seized with some sudden fancy to foot it with the rest. The grand gentlemen would ask the village maidens to dance, or lead forward one of their own blushing ladies, half shy, half bold.

Pauline was shy to-night, and when Maurice invited her, as he was in duty bound to do, she hung back a little ashamed, and yet, as I could see, she was only wanting a few words from him to give her courage. Her eyes looked so kind, her smile was so humble and yet so sweet for an instant. She blushed. 'Won't you come?' said he gaily.

'Don't you see that the child is timid,' said Madame Valmy, hastily. 'I will begin! I am an old woman, I have faced more terrible things than a village dance. Will you hold my fan, M. Fontaine, and my shawl?'

Maurice could only offer his arm with ready alacrity.

Fontaine bowed and took the fan. Pauline's happy eyes seemed to grow dim. The country people looked on; they had whispered a little to each other, hung back for a

few minutes, and then again they seemed to be caught up by the wave, and to forget our presence. The tree rustled over our heads, and some birds awakened by the music chirped a note or two. The fields lay darkling round us, a great round pale moon slowly ascended from beyond the distant willow-trees. Its faint rays lit up the dark fields beyond, and the canal gleamed; so did the tiled roof of the new machine-house as it glittered in the light of this cold river of light, while the dancers stamped and twirled and whirled again, and the music went on its lively monotonous round, and the notes recurred with unflagging spirit.

Madame Fournier found a seat on a bench under a tree, Pauline and I stood beside her; our gentlemen came and went. There was a paper lantern hanging from a branch just over Madame Fournier's head, so that she seemed a sort of beacon to return to at intervals. Captain Thompson, seeing that Sidonie was dancing, invited me. We did not join the general circle, but chose a modest corner in the shade, where he and I danced a little polka to the music, on our own account.

When he brought me back to Madame Fournier, Madame Valmy with a lively sign of the head was just going off a second time with M. le Comte.

'Ah! Capitaine,' said Fontaine, who was standing by, 'we are admiring Madame Valmy's graceful talent. Yes, from out yonder you will see them better.' 'Admirable

man!' continued the Maire, looking after him. 'There he goes! Times are changed since I first knew Madame Valmy. Look at her, what grace, what gaiety! Ah! here is our good doctor. How do you do, Jobard? What are you doing here?'

'I have been to see Madelon at the mill,' said Jobard, with a professional air. 'She sleeps, eats, the symptoms are good; I feared cholera, but there is no danger whatever. I am glad to see Madame Valmy enjoying herself so much. She too has been indisposed. She sent for me only yesterday; my medicine has done her good. How she goes round! Look at her! round and round!'

'Madame Valmy indisposed!' said Fontaine; 'she never complained to me!'

'Oh!' said Jobard (he was a little, high-shouldered, shuffling man), 'it has been a mere nothing—malaise! migraine! want of sleep, want of sleep! She could not close her eyes for the rats in that garret. I know them. I lived in the house that winter after poor M. Valmy died. There was noise enough to wake a regiment, wind in the chimney, rats and mice racing in the wainscot, and that tree outside creaking and swaying. Along with Madame Valmy's medicine, I sent some physic for messieurs the rats, which I found very efficacious when I was there. Those old houses, they are all alike. I infinitely prefer my present domicile.' And Jobard, seeing a patient, walked on with a bow to Madame Fournier.

'Excellent man!' said Fontaine aloud, as Jobard walked off through the crowd; then he continued, lowering his voice: 'He may well complain of the noises in that house; there are those who assure me that rats can hardly account for the extraordinary noises which are heard in the Pavilion at times. Those who believe in the supernatural declare that—but we will not talk of it. La Mère Coqueau, you know her—her daughter married Leroux, the blacksmith—once ventured to ask Mademoiselle Julienne her impression. She says she shall never forget the look in the woman's face.'

'Madame Coqueau is an old goose,' said Pauline, impatiently. 'Why are you always quoting her, M. Fontaine?'

'She has played her rôle,' said Fontaine, slightly offended. 'I do not wish to bring her again upon the scene.' Pauline, however, was not listening to the Maire, but to the music, and her eyes were following Maurice and Madame Valmy twirling in time to it. The two fiddles were answering each other with some fresh sudden spirit, and the whole company seemed stamping in time to the measure. A little wind came blowing from across the fields.

Madame Fournier, who liked anything in the shape of a medical disquisition, now began asking, with some interest, of what illness M. Valmy died. 'It was an unhealthy season,' said Fontaine with his eloquent finger.

'He had caught some chill out in his peat-fields, and he sent for Dr. Jobard. He seemed recovering; they talked of moving to Paris next day, when in the evening he was suddenly attacked with stomach cramp. Jobard was again sent for—I fetched him myself. He did everything that could be done, applied cataplasms of bran, prescribed infusions of tea, and of violets. I called to enquire the first thing in the morning. Madame Valmy was most unremitting in her attentions; she allowed no one else to come near him, gave him every medicine, watched him night and day; nothing was neglected; it was all in vain; he died, poor man, and so much the better for everybody. You would not recognise Madame Valmy now if you had seen her then. Have you ever remarked a blue scar upon her throat?' said Fontaine, in a whisper, for Maurice and his partner were dancing past us at that moment. 'Shall I tell you—'

'I have no curiosity for such details,' interrupted Pauline, coldly. 'She has evidently forgotten her troubles, whatever they may have been.'

'But this cholera is alarming,' said Madame Fournier, with placid persistence. 'I had not heard of it before.'

'A man and an old woman died at Estournelles last year,' said Fontaine, 'and you know what terrible mortality we have had in Paris.'

'So it *was* cholera,' said Pauline.

'Dr. Jobard had no doubt whatever on the subject,' replied the Maire.

'I never pay the slightest attention to anything that Dr. Jobard says,' cried Pauline.

'Pardon me, Mademoiselle' (in a reproving tone). 'Our excellent doctor has had great experience both with cattle and human subjects. He described the theory of cholera to me only the other day; it is proved to be some subtle poison which penetrates the system. Valmy, predisposed to absorb the miasma, fell a victim to its fatal influence. . . . Mademoiselle,' said the Maire, interrupting himself suddenly, 'they are playing a country dance; will you not honour me?' The fiddlers had changed their key.

Madame Valmy came gaily up, sliding her feet, leaning back on her partner's arm. She looked into Pauline's face with her sparkling blue eyes. 'Dear Pauline,' she said, 'you must spare M. Maurice to me for this one more dance; I am positively a child where dancing is concerned. I could go on for hours.'

It certainly occurred to me that Pauline and I were a great deal younger than she was, and not less inclined to dance. Pauline, however, refused Fontaine's invitation, although I heard Madame Fournier nervously urging her to take a turn. The girl was very pale, very determined. She wished to remain by her mother, she said.

It was at her suggestion that Fontaine offered me his

arm, and we set off together, but Pauline's looks haunted me, and I thought that my partner also was pre-occupied.

Sometimes as we twirled in time, and advanced and retreated, I caught sight of Captain Thompson's little round face, anxiously watching his beautiful Sidonie in her flights.

'She dances too much,' said Fontaine, who was also on the look-out. 'When people have had such a life as hers, they are apt to forget everything when pleasure comes in their way. But I can see that Thompson, who is the best fellow in the world, is vexed. Valmy never allowed her to dance. Perhaps he was in the right.'

Fontaine seemed haunted by some spirit of reminiscence that evening. At every pause in the dance he kept returning to the story he had been telling us. 'Who would believe in the past, who saw her now?' he said. 'I know for certain she was once met flying from her home, but Valmy came after her, and she went back to him. They say he kept her locked up for three months on that occasion. It was then he had the gate leading from the courtyard to the garden fastened up.'

There was something revolting to me in the thought of a woman, who had suffered so much, now apparently forgetting it all to the sound of a fiddle; forgetting her own past, and another person's present—so it seemed to me. She appeared to have no scruples; she absorbed Maurice that evening, without a thought for Pauline, or for Captain

Thompson, who went away, I think, for I saw him no more. Maurice asked Pauline to dance once again, but it was evident that it was only from a sense of duty that he did so; and if Pauline consented, it was only to give a countenance to Maurice himself, and to prevent people from saying that he was entirely neglecting his betrothed. It was not a happy evening. Madame Fournier alone should have been satisfied. She made a heroic effort to give her daughter pleasure; her conscience was its own reward.

'Are we never going home, mamma?' said Pauline, wearily.

The music had ceased, the peasants were talking together and buzzing like a swarm of bees. As we were making our way across the green, towards the corner of the road where Madame Fournier had desired her carriage to meet her, we came upon two gentlemen walking arm-in arm in the shadow. One was Maurice, the other was Fontaine, who seemed to have drawn his companion away from the crowd. It was impossible not to gather portions of the Maire's emphatic sentences as we came along: 'You cannot prevent chattering tongues. Your duty to your interesting fiancée—excuse the frankness of an old friend.'

Pauline stopped short, shrinking back. 'Oh, mamma!' she said, breathing quickly. 'Is this true? Everybody talking. Oh, come away. Oh! what shall we do?'

Madame Fournier, with some motherly presence of

mind, only shrugged her shoulders. 'My dear child, if we listened to all the advice people give, do you think anybody would ever have a moment's peace? Fontaine is a chatterer, who likes to make gossip where it does not exist.'

'Ladies, you are going!' cried the Maire, springing forward as he heard his name. 'M. le Comte! Mesdames Fournier are going. I will call their carriage,' he continued, talking on to hide his embarrassment.

The music had begun again. Maurice, looking very black and very stiff, came up to the carriage-door.

'Are you coming with us?' said Madame Fournier, very coldly.

'No, no; remain and dance your dance out,' said Pauline, not unkindly, but in a chill, sad voice that seemed to come from a heavy heart. Maurice bowed, and we drove away without him, and reached home in silence.

'Well, have you enjoyed your dance?' said Fournier, when he let us in.

CHAPTER IX.

AN EXPLANATION.

When I saw Madame Fournier again next day, her eyes were red, her face was pale; she looked as if she had not slept, and Fournier himself did not seem to me in much better condition. It was a melancholy morning. The old couple kept together. Fournier avoided De Mesnil; Madame Fournier treated him with ceremonious politeness. Pauline, I think, must have guessed what was coming; she stayed in her room all the morning, and sat over her embroidery, stitching and stitching as women do who are anxious, and who cannot trust themselves to cease from work. De Mesnil did not appear at luncheon.

M. Fournier had pulled his little black velvet skullcap over his eyes, he had tucked his afternoon newspaper, unopened, under his arm; he was walking up and down the hall, crossing and recrossing the great square of light by the open door; his coffee was standing on a table, cooling and untasted; his brows were bent, his steps were hurried and heavy. Fontaine's remarks, as repeated by

Madame Fournier, had made a great impression upon him. It was all the more vivid because the Maire had seemed to him to speak his own impressions. It does not matter whether impressions are real or imaginary, the fact of another person unexpectedly speaking out what we have secretly felt seems to give a sudden life to our silence. The feeling becomes a part of real things, it gains speech and action; it is life itself, and ceases to be a criticism. Fournier's idea that Maurice was trifling with his daughter, and not behaving well by her, now seemed to take consistency and shape, voice and action; all his deep tenderness for Pauline turned to indignation against Maurice. But I don't imagine that Fournier, good father as he was, quite understood what it was he was asking of his daughter when he expected her to give up suddenly and immediately the wonderful, new, irresistible interest which had come into her existence. All her life Pauline had wanted affection, and though she had known Maurice only for a few weeks, the instinct to love and to devote herself had been there long before. She had been told that he was the person with whom the rest of her life was to be spent, she had felt that it was to him that her heart went out unhesitatingly; it seemed so natural to love him, so unnatural not to love him. Her affection for him appeared to her something quite independent of his affection for her—in the same way as a mother's affection for her child does not depend upon that child's love in return. When her father called

her, Pauline came hurrying up to ask what he wanted. What was it he was saying as he marched up and down? She asked playfully, but her smile changed as she looked up into his face. He was very stern and short. He told her that he could allow this trifling no longer, that she must take courage and face the truth, and acknowledge it to herself; that De Mesnil was playing with her, acting dishonourably. It was as if some one had suddenly struck a heavy blow upon her heart.

'What do you mean, papa?' said Pauline, leaning back against the billiard-table. 'Why do you say this?' she asked, speaking with dry, parched lips. She had half guessed what was coming, but she had put it away all that day.

The old man was so unhappy at what he had to say that he answered sharply, from pain of the pain he was giving.

'You know what it means as well as I do, Pauline,' he said. 'I am not a patient man; I cannot wait in silence, and see my daughter insulted, while I, her father, am outraged, defied. Look; can you not see for yourself? remember all that occurred yesterday. Have you no dignity, my child?'

'I hope not,' says Pauline. 'What has dignity got to do with what one feels in one's heart? Dignity is for outside things.'

'Hush, Pauline; don't talk such nonsense!' cried Fournier, exasperated; and indeed I could understand it.

By some unlucky chance, at this very minute our usual visitors came along the terrace, the Captain and the Maire and Madame Valmy, and Maurice, who had been walking up and down an hour past and who had seen them coming, and gone to meet them. The Captain was a little ahead, talking to Fontaine. The two gentlemen did not enter the house at once, but turned up the path that leads to the stables.

Maurice had stopped short, unconscious of the eyes that were fixed upon them. He was gazing up into Sidonie's face. She was half turning away, half accepting his homage.

'Look at him. To-morrow,' cries Fournier, furious, 'he goes back to his garret! That devil of a woman may follow him if she chooses. My daughter and I wash our hands of him. Such conduct is not to be entertained by honest people. Do you hear, Pauline?'

'I hear you, papa,' says Pauline. 'It is enough to break my marriage, without breaking my ears as well;' and then her voice broke; a blush came into her face, and she said, 'One thing I ask, which is, that you do not condemn Maurice unheard. I shall never care for anyone else; never, papa, never; remember that. I shall not forget, even though he may forget me.'

'Is this the way you speak? you, a modest girl,

brought up at your mother's side,' cries Fournier, furious, bothered, and affected.

'Well, then, I am not modest,' cries Pauline. 'And the thing that I am most grateful to you for is that you have brought me up to think for myself. I am not like Marie des Ormes in her blue and white. I am not a gentle, obedient, young girl. I respect my parents; I will not act against their wishes. But, oh! that it should be you, of all the people in the world, to make me so unhappy,' cried Pauline, with a great burst of tears, throwing herself into her father's arms. 'And, oh! I love him, father, with all my heart I love Maurice.'

'My child,' cried poor Fournier, 'it is not I who make you unhappy. Don't, my dear one, I beseech you, do not cry. It is that imbecile out yonder. Look at him, he has forgotten your very existence. May the devil take that woman! The day will come when you will thank your old father.'

'Let Maurice come and explain for himself,' cried Pauline, very loud and not caring who heard her. 'Maurice! Maurice!' she called, going to the door. Maurice heard Pauline's voice calling across the terrace. I saw him turn, say something hastily to his companion, and come hurrying towards the house. His face looked so pale and scared, his eyes so bright and wild, that it seemed to me that he was at least no heartless, indifferent actor in the play that was being played out.

Pauline was still standing at the door when Maurice came up. She went up to him and put out her hand, but he did not take it. She began at once without any preamble.

'I called you; I want to hear the truth from yourself Do you know what my father is telling me?' she said. 'He says that all that has passed between us must come to an end; that you must go back to Paris, and that I must stay here and marry somebody else. What do you say to his plan? What do you say to it?' she repeated shrilly, with her eyes fixed upon his face.

For a minute Maurice was silent.

'What does he say? Who cares what he says?' cried Monsieur Fournier, almost brutally. 'All he has got to do now is to hold his tongue. I don't suppose he wishes for any explanations from me. If he does, he may chance to hear things which may not please him.'

'You cannot tell me anything I do not already know, that I have not already told myself,' said the young man, speaking in a low, thrilling voice, quickly and distinctly. 'You may say to me anything you please, it is only what I deserve to hear. The deep respect and gratitude I feel for all your daughter's goodness and——'

'Be silent!' shouts Fournier, in a rage. 'Do you suppose that anyone here wants your fine speeches? Take them where they are in request, but do not insult my daughter by such professions after your conduct.'

'He does not insult me, papa,' Pauline said; 'I believe him.' There was something touching in the girl's honest accent. 'I believe him, and so do you,'—and she took her father's hand in both hers as she spoke—'I am not going to marry him. I could not if it is true that he feels as you think. I do not wonder at it.' Her voice faltered. 'But you see I can understand it all, and I daresay I should do the same as he, and be ready to leave the people who cared most for me for those I felt I loved the best.'

Her steady voice failed; she could scarcely finish her sentence, and she turned from us and ran quickly upstairs to her room, passing Madame Fournier, who was leisurely creaking down from her afternoon nap to wakeful life again. Madame Valmy also appeared at the same instant smiling from the garden. I wondered she had the courage to walk up as usual. With an impatient exclamation Fournier moved away.

'This is intolerable. Come in here. I have to speak to you in private,' he said to the Comte. And he walked to his study, followed by the young man.

'What is it, mon ami?' said Madame Fournier, trotting in after them, and leaving me alone in the big flagged ante-room with our visitor, who looked surprised but by no means disconcerted.

'What is happening?' says Madame Valmy, looking round. 'Why has everybody run away?' and she settled her laces and gently flirted her fan. 'Here you are! have

you been to the stables?' she said, as the Captain and Fontaine now joined us. 'All the Fournier family are shut up in there,' said she, pointing to the study door. 'They seem engaged on some very mysterious business,' Madame Valmy continued, sinking back for a moment in a big chair.

We could hear voices rising and falling behind the closed door, and more than one angry burst from Fournier. I think Madame Valmy might have guessed what it was all about had she tried to do so.

'I am privileged, I will ascertain,' said Fontaine, walking with precaution across the hall and knocking carefully at the door.

'Who is there?' shouts Fournier from within.

Fontaine opens the panel a little way, slides in—the door is again shut. Madame Valmy shrugs her shoulders and begins to walk up and down.

'That is a pretty print,' says she, looking at a framed plan of Sebastopol which was hanging on the wall. Then, with a slight yawn, 'I am tired,' she said. 'I think I should like to go home, if Mademoiselle Mary will make my excuses to Madame Fournier when the mysterious business is over. Take me home, Beauvoir.'

Captain Thompson started up delighted. It was not often that his lovely intended would consent to come away under his exclusive escort.

'Yes, you are tired; you should rest,' he said. 'Yes,

let us go at once. You are not strong, Sidonie; you never spare yourself.' In this he was quite mistaken, poor man; but if Sidonie had wished to spare herself a scene she was too late, for at this moment Pauline, still looking very pale, but quite composed, came down the stairs again, and as Madame Valmy was going, she called to her to stop.

'Is Maurice already gone down to the village? Pauline asked. 'Are you going after him?'

'Why do you ask *me*?' said Madame Valmy. 'He is still here, I believe; but I am not his keeper. It is not me that he is obliged to marry;' and she turned with a curious feminine dart, and took Captain Thompson's arm.

'Come, Beauvoir,' she said; 'Mademoiselle Fournier will be best without us.'

'No, I want to speak to you,' said Pauline, gravely· 'stay for a minute.'

'I will go outside!' cried Captain Thompson, still quite unconscious. 'I will smoke my cigar, and when you young ladies have had your confab, call me back, Sid, for you ought to get home.'

He walked away. Madame Valmy was, I think, curious to know what Pauline had to say. She let him go, after a moment's hesitation, and came to meet the girl with an odd smile.

'Have you had a quarrel?' she asked; 'do you want me to help you to make it up? I'm afraid it *was* very

naughty of him to dance with me all last night; but I have got him into good training for you, and you ought to be grateful,' she said, with a laugh.

Sidonie was not used to simple outspoken natures such as Pauline, and she did not calculate upon the consequences of her ill-timed joke.

'Listen,' said Pauline, in her dogmatic way; 'do not think that I do not blame you because I am silent? Why did you come in our way? I could have made him happy, I think, if it had not been for you. You say you are not going to marry him. Do you think it is any comfort to me that he is to be made unhappy too? Are you acting honestly by us all?' and she fixed her own honest eyes upon the other.

As Pauline spoke, a sort of light came into her looks and a tone into her voice. She looked far handsomer at that moment than Madame Valmy. She stood her ground, sincere, indignant, uttering her protest against wrong.

Madame Valmy seemed to me to grow pale, then grey; all the beautiful colour died out of her cheeks, all the glitter out of her hair; she laughed a nasty little shrill whistling laugh. 'What a dear impetuous child you are,' she said, 'and what foolish, foolish things you take into your silly little head! What have I to do with all this? M. de Mesnil comes to see me. I gave him a lesson in dancing last night. I have a great regard for him, and am only too glad to make him welcome; but, my dear child do

you imagine for one instant that I wish to interfere with your claims upon his attention? You should be more careful before you make such unfounded assertions;' and Madame Valmy drew herself up; she had found her part, so it seemed to me. At first, taken by surprise, she had really not known what to say or what attitude to take. It was one thing to be secretly enjoying Pauline's mortification, and her own sense of power and Maurice's unconcealed devotion, and another to be called to account by her outspoken rival; questioned, rebuked, and desired to marry him on the spot. This seemed the strangest complication of all, and I could quite understand Madame Valmy's objections to pledge herself to any definite course.

'Do you mean that, notwithstanding all that has passed, you are not sure of your feelings?' said Pauline.

At this moment the hall-door opened, and Thompson's head was put in. 'Nearly ready?' said he.

'Of this I feel sure, that Captain Thompson will protect me, and that you have strangely forgotten yourself, Pauline, in the way in which you have been speaking!' cried Madame Valmy, greatly relieved by the interruption. 'Tell her, Beauvoir,' she said, twirling swiftly round, 'that you will not see me insulted by cruel suspicion,' and, as chance would have it, as she pointed to Pauline, with a sob, the study-door opened, and Maurice, of the pale face, came out. The wretched woman now turned towards him, still holding by Captain Thompson's arm. 'M. Maurice,'

she said, 'I will not, cannot believe that you are aware of the things which have been said to me. Oh, it is too dreadful!' and she buried her face in her hands for an instant.

Poor Maurice looked from one to the other. He had himself only just escaped from an agitating scene, in which M. Fournier had certainly not spared Madame Valmy; and for a moment it seemed to him as if all the blame at which he had been chafing had been poured out upon her head. She looked at him with such appealing eyes, she was so pale, so trembling. Thompson was stepping forward, also prepared to do battle for his Sidonie, but not quite knowing whom to attack, nor what to complain of. Pauline stood defiant, with flashes of sullen displeasure. She blushed crimson when Maurice looked at her reproachfully. It seemed to him at the time that her looks accused her, poor child.

'I need scarcely tell you that I am not accountable for what may have been said to pain you,' he said, in a low, indignant voice. 'I can only beg you, madame, who are generous, to forgive those who may have been wanting in generosity.'

'Forgive, forgive,' said the Captain; 'that is not the question. Of course, one forgives real injuries; but people should be careful before giving way to their silly tempers, and remember that they give a great deal of unnecessary pain and annoyance. I am sure Mademoiselle

Fournier will be the first to regret this to-morrow morning. Come along, Sid, it is time we got home.'

He pulled Madame Valmy's arm through his, and the two walked away together. Maurice was already gone; poor Pauline stood silent, self-reproachful, overwhelmed; it suddenly seemed to her that she had been ridiculous, unkind, unreasonable; she turned pale, hard, stupid; she stood in the centre of the hall; all the fire was gone out of her eyes.

Was it so, had she been ungenerous? Maurice said so, and his look of reproach had pierced her more than his words.

We were all silent in the study that evening; how much had happened, how unchanged our life appeared; the green lamp was trimmed; books and newspapers lay upon the table, the servants had lighted a wood fire, which was comfortably crackling. Pauline sat down on a low stool before the flame, resting her chin against her hands. Madame Fournier watched her with an anxious face for a time, then settled herself for a nap in the big arm-chair. Fontaine, who had remained at Fournier's request, sat down to a game of écarté by the light of the green lamp. There was something homely and tranquil in this interior: the peaceful crackling of the fire, the even glow of the lamp, the quiet slumbers of the old woman in her chimney-corner—all diffused a certain sense of peace and of repose,

only all the room seemed to me somehow full of the pain in poor Pauline's sad and aching eyes.

The window was uncurtained. The clouds were drifting across the sky, and the moon was on the wane. Once I thought I heard a cry coming faintly from a long way off. Fontaine put down his cards for an instant.

'It is only some bird or animal,' said he.

Pauline started from her dream, and presently went to the window and looked out for a minute, and soon after left the room. She did not come back any more that night. For the first time in her young life, she had been met and overwhelmed by one of those invisible currents of feeling which carry people, and boundaries, and stationary things all before them. Pauline, who had been so confident, so intolerant for others, was strangely humbled and overcome by the force of her own emotions. She had despised people who 'gave way.' What was this strange new power that had laid its relentless hand upon her? She hated herself, but all the same she could not help the suspicions, the self-reproaches, the emotions, which distracted her so cruelly. When generous and well-meaning people suspect others of wrong, it is an almost intolerable pain and humiliation. The thought recurs, it cannot be put way, but it spoils all peace of mind, all tranquil enjoyment of life. Mistrust of oneself is perhaps the worst form of this phase of feeling, and Pauline had suddenly lost confidence in her own infallibility.

CHAPTER X.

THE LODGE IN THE GARDEN OF CUCUMBERS.

When I awoke next morning, she was standing by my bedside. She looked pale and haggard. She had not been able to sleep all night, she told me.

'I want you to do something for me,' she said. 'I want you to dress quickly and to come with me to the village. Madame Valmy is going. I know it—never mind how I know it. I think my mind would be more at ease if I could see her once more. Perhaps I was hard upon her yesterday. Am I jealous? Is that what ails me?' She pushed back the curtain from the window and threw it open. All the sweet autumnal light came floating in from the garden without, and a golden withered leaf from the creeper overhanging the balcony dropped on to the wooden floor. The fragrant breath of morning seemed to fill the room. For a minute Pauline stood leaning against the window rail, looking out across the park and the fields beyond, towards the thatched village with its belfry and enclosing poplar-trees. Then

she turned, smiling, with a sweet look in her face, something like the autumnal sunshine, at once troubled and sincere. She signed to me to lose no time, and left the room.

The house was scarcely awake when we left it, hurrying down by the little side-path leading to the canal. I remember the look of that early morning so well! The delicate fragrant perfume from the burnt leaves, the stir in the foliage, through which the stems were beginning to show, the tranquil faint tones of the sky, and the wheeling flight of a great company of birds high overhead. At the turn of the road we met the postman, in his blue linen smock, with dusty boots. He had a letter for me, he said, and one for M. Fournier, which sent a sudden glow into Pauline's pale cheek, for she recognised M. de Mesnil's writing. I opened my letter as I walked along. It was heavily weighted, and contained the long-missing key of the store-closet for which I had written, of which so much had been said and which had been found at last. There was also a letter in verse from my kind old uncle, who sometimes amused himself by this style of composition: 'Pocket and lock it,' 'easy and Visy,' and so on. I would have read it to Pauline, but she would not listen, and only hurried faster and faster along the road. She would not tell me at first how it was that she knew of Madame Valmy's plans, but after a while she suddenly said, 'I do not know why I do not tell you at once. Maurice came

up last night. I saw him coming across the garden when I was at the window, looking out, and I went to meet him, and he told me of this He told me other things,' she said with a strange sort of burst. 'It all seems so miserable, so strange! Will you be silent if I trust you? He adores her. She has promised to marry him in a year. Why did he tell me? Why did he tell me?'

'Why, indeed!' said I. 'Pauline, he is a miserable creature.' But Pauline would not let me blame him.

'It was to exonerate her, he told me,' she said. 'He asked me to think more kindly of her. And now,' said Pauline, 'I do not know whether or not I think more kindly of her.'

'But is she not going to tell the Captain?' I asked. 'Is she going on deceiving him? Are you not going to tell him, Pauline?'

'I!' cried the girl, with a sort of laugh. 'Do you think it my place? And, besides this, I daresay we are too late. I may not see him again. They are going away. Maurice told me they had determined to leave for Paris at once;' then she caught my hand in hers. 'The worst part is to come,' she said, in a dry, matter-of-fact voice. 'Madame Valmy has assured Maurice that the Captain is ill—that he has not a year to live, and that is why she keeps silence. It might kill him, she says, to know the truth. For my part, I had rather die of a truth than live upon a lie, I think. But Madame Valmy likes

to arrange her life to her circumstances,' and Pauline broke off; a burning blush came over her face. 'Mary, I am frightened and miserable; I fear I know not what.'

'I think you should speak to your father,' I said, gravely.

'I want to see her first,' said Pauline, now quite piteous. 'She might say something to undo all this horrible doubt. Maurice believes in her. For his sake I try and believe in her too.'

As Pauline predicted, when we came to the Pavilion the great gates were open; the chickens were pecking in the courtyard; there seemed to be not a soul about the place.

'They went at seven o'clock, driving with the luggage. Madame Coqueau is to come and keep the house,' said little Jeanne Picard, who was peeping in at the gate. 'She has not yet arrived; she is gone to look after the cows.'

Pauline did not answer. She stood still for an instant —then she walked in, crossed the yard, mounted the stone steps, and marched straight into the drawing-room, where all the chairs and tables were pushed about just as they had been left the night before. The newspaper lay on the floor; one of the Captain's gloves had been forgotten in a chair; the shutters were half-closed, the daylight came freshly shining in and reflected from the flower-glasses, and the pretty ornaments all about the room. On a sofa a

little piece of work was lying. It was a cigar-case, of embroidered canvas, with an elaborate M interwoven with coronets. Pauline took it up, looked at it for an instant, flung it down once more, and then suddenly dropping into the corner of the sofa, hid her face away, and I could see that she was crying. I was obliged to rouse her almost immediately, for I heard some one coming. As usual it was Fontaine. He had seen us pass by, and now entered the room with an exclamation—fresh from his morning toilet.

Pauline made an effort, choked down her tears, and met him quietly. As I think of it all, it seems like a vague sort of dream; so disjointed, so sudden and tragical were the events which followed.

'You are too late,' said the Maire, cheerfully. 'Our good friends are gone! They have stolen a march upon us. The Captain drove Madame Valmy to the station early this morning; they were to take the train at Estournelles: he told me he wanted to leave some directions with his manager there. His man was to take the luggage to Corbeil and rejoin them there. Mademoiselle Julienne was not with her mistress. I don't know how she went,' said Fontaine, thoughtfully. 'Possibly she started last night. I don't know what called the Captain away. I think he was anxious, and wished to consult a physician.'

'For his health?' said Pauline, quickly.

'For her health,' said Fontaine. 'He told me himself

that she was strange—hysterical; that he was not easy, and did not trust Jobard entirely,' said the Maire, lightly.

'Madame Valmy not well!' said Pauline, vehemently. 'Monsieur Fontaine, is it only Madame Valmy you have been anxious about? Tell me, do you believe what she tells people in confidence, that he, the Captain, is suffering from a mortal disease?'

She had spoken at last, and Monsieur Fontaine seemed taken aback.

'A mortal disease!' he repeated. 'Pray explain yourself, Mademoiselle. I really cannot follow you.'

'How can I explain myself?' cried Pauline, all excited. 'Is it my business? Am I a spy set to watch other people? I am a wicked, suspicious girl, Monsieur Fontaine. I came here to confess to her, but she is gone, and I don't know—I don't know what I mean.' And she burst out crying once more and hid her face in her hands.

'My dear lady, you are ill—out of sorts. No wonder, after all that has occurred. Come away, come home with me. Let us consult Jobard; that good fellow will give you some soothing mixture,' cried the Maire, very kind, full of concern. 'What is it? do not be alarmed. Yes; I too hear something. What can it be?' said he, seeing me looking about. 'Wait here—pray wait here; I will return,' he cried, divided between his concern for Pauline and his intelligent interest in everything going on.

What was it? I had heard it for some time. Pauline

held my hand tight; other people from the village were crowding round, and the man who had been sent for help began to tell how the horse had taken fright at the sudden working of the poor Captain's machine, and galloped across a field. The Captain and Madame Valmy had been thrown from the carriage, the Captain had been terribly hurt by a wheel. 'It is too true,' Fournier said, gravely. 'He has been brought to our house; it was the nearest. I have come for the doctor. You had better come home at once,' he said to us. Pauline could only cling to her father's arm. 'And Madame Sidonie, where is she?' asked Fontaine; 'is she not being attended to?'

No one answered, no one knew. 'She is certainly dead,' said one of the excited carters; 'they have gone to look for her now; we came off for help.'

Coming from the courtyard outside, a sound of wheels, of voices of people talking and exclaiming. There were people in the yard outside; a cart had come up to the gates with two peasants, whose scared faces told of some misfortune. Then Madame Coqueau, with a grandchild in her arms, came hurrying across the yard. 'Monsieur Fontaine, Monsieur le Maire, do you hear, is this true what they are saying? Aubry and his son have come in from Estournelles in their cart for my son to fix the carriage-wheels, to bring home those unfortunates.' 'Wounded! who is wounded?' said the Maire, hurrying forward.

'No one knows for certain,' said the old woman.

'Some say it is the lady, some say it is the Captain, who is killed.'

Then a voice called 'Here is M. Fournier.' I felt it a great relief at that minute to see Fournier coming in at the gates of the courtyard; the Maire hurried to meet him, and stood speaking excitedly.

The hot sun came pouring down into the little courtyard as we all stood there. The shadows were striking, black and fierce. The ducks, missing their accustomed meal, came straggling up to be fed, and presently one and another neighbour came in with scared looks and hushed voices. Fournier took his daughter upon his arm and drew her a little aside; she burst into piteous sobs, as he led her away through the crowd of children and peasant people. I followed with kind Madame Bougie from the grocer's shop, not a little grateful for her friendly exclamations and sympathies. Fournier left us in the shop for a minute while he went back to fetch the pony-carriage, which was waiting at the doctor's door. Madame Bougie took us into the back parlour with the glass door that opened to the garden. She brought us glasses of orange-flower water, that panacea of French emotions. She would let in no one else until Fournier's return. Fontaine came to the door, but she drove him off. I was glad of it, for Pauline began to shiver nervously when she heard his voice.

Fournier summoned us in a few minutes 'The doctor

has gone on in the cart,' he said. 'I have the things he wants, come quickly.' As we drove along poor Pauline burst out.

'Oh, papa,' she said, 'I must confess to you that since yesterday I have been half beside myself with miserable suspicions. I have not known what to do or how to bear it all. Oh, papa, as I think it over, it seems to me like a crime that I have committed. To think a cruel thing is such a hopeless wrong, and now, now it is too late to repent. She is gone, and I was hating her and suspecting her of horrible things, of murder almost. Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do?'

Fournier did not attempt to comfort her.

'We are all liable to mistake,' he said; 'all ready to judge our neighbours harshly at times. You and I have, perhaps, been hard upon that poor woman, Pauline, and we must bear our punishment. There is poor Thompson, he has done no wrong, he is terribly hurt. It is fortunate for him that they brought him to your mother to nurse.'

How well I remember our drive back to the Château through the pretty autumnal avenues, over the bright brown carpet of leaves that had fallen the night before. Pauline was sitting with her head upon her father's shoulder, quite silent and scared. I too felt utterly stupefied and bewildered until kind Madame Fournier met us on the terrace and put her arms about us. I shall

never forget her goodness and motherly tenderness during all the days that immediately followed the disaster. The Captain lay between life and death; Pauline too, was ill, and requiring the tenderest care; Madame Fournier's motherly looks seemed to fall with comfort on one and on another. She seemed transformed. But the extraordinary part of the accident was that, though the place was searched, no sign could be discovered of Madame Valmy. She was not dead, she was not even badly hurt, for she had vanished! A carter who had seen the accident had hurried forward when they upset, and while he was attending to the Captain, Madame Valmy, who had been lying beside him in the road, must have picked herself up and gone away. The mystery was somewhat explained by the station-master at Estournelles, who said Madame Valmy had appeared at the station in some exhaustion, having run, she said, to catch the train; she had taken her ticket for Paris and gone off by the second morning train.

In vain the Captain asked for her; we none of us could tell him anything, for she was gone. The poor fellow fretted piteously for news. He lay for weeks at the Fourniers' house. He had hurt his back in his fall, his leg was broken, his head was injured, and it had been impossible to move him. 'It is strange,' he told us afterwards, 'what an odd presentiment of coming evil I had. I remember telling Sidonie, only the day before, that I knew my life was in danger—it was a feeling I cannot describe

—and here I am on your hands, and she—what may not be happening to her, poor little soul! It is true she has money.'

'She is well enough able to take care of herself, and of other people's money too,' said Fournier, brutally.

The disappearance was all the more extraordinary, because the Captain had given a large sum of money to Madame Valmy to take care of for him. He feared she might have been robbed, but we heard of her safely rejoining Julienne and the luggage at Corbeil. Then all sorts of strange rumours began to be set about. Maurice de Mesnil let out the most extraordinary and damaging fact of all. On the day of the accident Madame Valmy had found him out, in the office where he had taken work, and proposed to him to go off at once to America with certain funds at her disposal. She would not say how she had come by them, but Julienne, who was with her, blurted out the truth, and Maurice indignantly refused. It was not till long after that Fontaine received a letter from New York one day, from Sidonie herself. She begged him to see to one or two things she had left unsettled, to arrange about the letting of the house. 'You may have been surprised at my strange disappearance,' she said. 'In my despair, thinking my dear friend was no more, I scarcely knew what I did, and rushed away. How I found myself here—I can scarcely tell. But there is little to take me back to that little village, so full of sad memories, and here

I must remain. Julienne is with me, but her temper is very trying still. Farewell, dear M. Fontaine, you are the person I most regret and whom I oftenest look to in my dreary exile.'

Jobard, when cross-questioned by Fournier and the Maire, solemnly affirmed that the cause of Valmy's death was cholera. The symptoms were unmistakable, the patient had rallied, and seemed recovering, when he suddenly sank from exhaustion. Jobard himself was present at the time, and had been administering stimulants. Fournier consulted with Fontaine, and came to the conclusion that there was no reason to doubt Jobard's professional opinion, deliberately given.

I was sent for home long before the Captain was sufficiently recovered to leave his room. It was perhaps best for him to lie there quietly with the good, kind, worthy Fourniers to keep watch over him, and to prevent the many rumours and suspicions from without from wounding him afresh as he lay upon his bed of sickness.

I have not been to Visy since the day when Pauline kissed me and said farewell by the old gateway; but I can still see her before me, as she was then, when I looked my last at her honest kind face, and at her home with all its friendly doors and windows open to the autumn sunshine. The Captain waved a thin hand from the balcony where they had carried him. Monsieur Fournier was waiting to drive me to the station. I remember the scent of the

clematis about the terrace; the sound of the cheerful country servants' voices calling, the glistening of the water as we crossed the little bridge over the canal.

There is one more fact I have to relate concerning my friends at Visy. One day, about a twelvemonth later, I received a printed form directed in Captain Thompson's handwriting, which gave me no little surprise. It was the formal announcement by M. and Madame Fournier of the Château of Visy le Roy, and by Miss Marianne and Miss Eliza Thompson of Lancaster, of a marriage contracted according to the Catholic and the Protestant rites, between their daughter Miss Pauline Hermance Louise Mélanie Fournier and their nephew Captain John Beauvoir Thompson, of Amphlett House, near Lancaster.

FINA

SOME PASSAGES FROM AN OLD DIARY OF MISS WILLIAMSON'S

April 30.

The child has a sweet inquisitive little face, and a pathetic voice. She looks hard at me when we meet on the stairs. Last Sunday I heard a crackling at my door, and, looking round, I saw my small fellow-lodger peeping in. 'Come in,' said I, making the first advances. 'How do you do?' The little girl advanced shyly, looking about. I saw her looking at the china-pot full of roses, at me, at my pictures. But she did not appear quite satisfied. 'Why do you live so high up?' she said. 'You can't walk out in the garden as mamma does.'

Fina—so they call her—lives on the ground floor, with her father and mother. The drawing-room floor is let to a fashionable barrister, who is out all day, and who only comes home to dress in splendour and white ties, and to drive off again in hansom cabs. *I* am only the second floor, and yet this seemed a very paradise of lodgings when I accidentally stumbled upon it one day on my way to Old Palace Square. A paradise with neither moth nor rust to corrupt, nor grasping landlady to peep through and steal. I think it was the sight of little Fina's face at the parlour window which attracted me. The housekeeper looked friendly, the house was clean and old-fashioned. I

thankfully climbed my two flights, unpacked my possessions, and settled down. Elsewhere I am a governess, and go my rounds; but here every day as I come back a transformation takes place. I hang up my waterproof, drop my claws and my instructive manner, tuck away my horns under my cap, and become a quiet, respectable, independent old lady, with cherry jam and seed-cake in my cupboard, an evening paper, and a comfortable arm-chair; but all these advantages do not seem to impress little Fina.

'Shouldn't you like to walk in the garden?' persists the child. 'Come here, Fina, and look out of my window,' I reply; 'you see I have my garden up here.'

This little street of ours runs from the main road into Old Palace Square, and my sitting-room windows open to the street, but my bed-room overlooks the gardens of the square, the many green lawns and flower-beds. This little corner is almost like the country. A thrush sings in the chestnut-tree beyond the wall, and awakens with the dawn; little Fina stands on the wooden bench at the end of our narrow inclosure and wistfully peeps over the bricks, at the children at play in the big garden next to ours. These big gardens act the part of benevolent protectors to us, their humbler neighbours. They send us whiffs of apple-blossom and lilac, notes of birds, and stray sprigs of green.

The garden of the house to which I go every day is

the one next to ours. It is the corner house of Old Palace Square, and has been let for the season to an old lady and her son and her grandchildren. There is an air of prosperity about its well-cleaned windows and brightly-scrubbed brasswork, and its respectable, over-fed butler. Mrs. Ellis, in her Indian shawls, is all in keeping with the place; she is a friend of my old friend Lady Z., who recommended me to apply for the situation. I had been afraid my inability to teach music might have stood in my way, but in this case music was not wanted. The Colonel did not wish his daughters to learn music, I was told. It seemed to me a curious fancy. I was a little late this morning; and, as I was hurrying downstairs, on my way to my pupils, I met my little girl again. I am fond of most children, but this one interests me specially. The parlour-door was open as I passed, and Fina's father was coming out. The child darted away from my side to meet him, and began dancing and swinging by his hand. 'Take care, little Fina; take care, you imp!' he cried; 'you will make me drop my violin.' He was carrying a violin-case under one arm. He was a big man, burly, and near six foot high, with an honest, somewhat careworn face, and a grizzled, shock head of hair. I believe he is the Francis Arnheim whose name I have seen in big letters outside the Albert Hall and elsewhere. Big as he is, his little girl seems at her ease with him. She paid no attention to her father's remonstrances, and went on with

her wild gymnastics. 'Mamma, come and take this little demon!' cried Arnheim; and then the mother came, smiling, to the rescue, and put her arms round the child and carried her off. I could not help thinking of this little scene five minutes later, as I stood on the doorstep of my employer's house in Old Palace Square.

The Colonel himself was going out for a ride, and impatiently waiting to be off. The poor children had come up with a shout from the garden of the square. Edgar, the boy, a handsome little fellow about eight years old, rushed across the road and, in his excitement, tumbled over the Colonel's shiny boots. 'Here comes Grasshopper, here she comes—Papa, do, do let me have one ride,' says little Edgar.

'I can't have this noise in the street,' says the Colonel. 'You should have been at your lessons long before this.' With this rebuke, which applied to the dilatory governess as well as to the pupils, the Colonel sprang upon his horse, never looking back, and caracoled erectly down the square to the admiration of the young ladies' school opposite, the baker's boy at the area gate, and the old mother at the drawing-room window. His friendly little audience of children meanwhile retreated somewhat disconcerted to the school-room.

There was not much in all this—not much, only everything. The musician's voice had seemed to me that of a father, but this was no father's voice. The little shabby

lodging where Fina dwelt seemed to me a real home, the big house, with its stair-rods and buckram and well-trained servants, a sort of lodging-house only. The old grandmother half asleep in her Indian shawls—a soft old lady like an owl—was the one bit of home to me in the big house. She was, what she looked, a lady of the old easy-going school—well-bred, well-born. At times she seemed rather afraid of her son and her eldest daughter. There was a second daughter I had not yet seen, who was coming home, the children told me.

'Aunt Josephine is *such* a dear,' said little Edgar, confidentially; 'isn't she, Josie? *She* will let us come to tea with you. Don't ask Aunt Bessie, *she* always says no.'

I could quite imagine this. Miss Ellis was a second edition of the Colonel—high heels, tight straps, stiff linen, sharp voice included.

Aunt Josephine, the younger sister, took after her mother. The very first morning she was at home she looked into the school-room with a friendly face to see what we were all about. She was hospitably welcomed by the young people. Mary, the eldest girl, pushed up a chair, Edgar gave it a thump to make it comfortable, little Josie thrust a lesson-book into her aunt's hand. 'You stop and do lessons, too,' said she.

'Very well,' said Aunt Josephine. And after this she got into the way of coming every day.

One morning she was reading by the window while we were at work when we heard the Colonel's voice outside calling hastily for Miss Ellis; then the door opened and he looked in; he was red, odd, excited. 'Bessie is out; I want you, Josephine,' he said. He appeared to be in great perturbation: he left the door open, and we heard his heels on the oil-cloth in the hall as he walked up and down, talking emphatically.

'He is here; I saw him myself. We shall have him here.' Then a sort of burst from Aunt Josephine—'Oh! perhaps she is with him. I *must* tell mamma—indeed I must.'

The three children had all left off their sums and were listening with the deepest attention. 'You had better shut the door, Edgar,' said I; and Edgar obeyed very slowly.

'It's about Aunt Mary,' said little Josie, nodding her head. 'Aunt Josephine always cries when it is about Aunt Mary.'

'Hush, Josie!' said little Mary; and as she spoke we heard a sob from Aunt Josie in the hall. It was a curious little family scene, but it did not concern me. I forbade all talking, and did my best to keep my little pupils quiet and attentive to their lessons. They were good, lovable children, and flourished upon somewhat arid soil, as one has seen little flowers upspringing in rocky, unlikely places. Although I forbade discussion, I found myself

puzzling over it all that evening as I sat alone with my lamp, and wondering why Aunt Mary was not to be mentioned. Had she disgraced herself? What crime had she committed? Then came a something to distract me from these fruitless digressions, and to carry me far, far away from my lonely corner—a lovely voice, Mendelssohn's voice, calling, singing of many a familiar home strain to me. Fina's father was playing down below on his violin, and somehow, irresistibly drawn and attracted, I presently found myself standing at the foot of the stairs in the moonlight, listening, absorbed, to his music. There also stood the landlady, raised from her kitchen. 'Ain't it beautiful, mem?' said she. We were both rather foolishly disconcerted when the back parlour door suddenly opened upon us. The room was full of harmony and light; the floor seemed scattered over with music-books. Someone was standing by a music-stand playing the violin. Many candles were burning. Out of all this radiance little Fina came darting, and calling out, 'Mamma, here is my lady!' And then the mother, with a very sweet, gentle face and manner, came out and invited me in.

After this it became a usual thing for me to go down when Mr. Arnheim was at home. As soon as his practice began little Fina used to come running up to my room to summon me. I am not sure that the music was the best thing to be found in that shabby back-parlour; the peace, the moderation, the mutual trust and confidence of that

little family touched me as much as the wonderful strains of Arnheim's violin. His playing was unequal, but there was a certain quality about it which I can scarcely describe—a suggestion beyond the music. I used to think Mrs. Arnheim had caught that something in her face—in her lovable eyes. I could not think who it was she reminded me of at times. Meanwhile I sit peacefully listening and watching her as she turns over her husband's leaves. The back windows are open to the garden, where little Fina is hopping about in the dusk. Mendelssohn speaks, and we are all silent and spell-bound.

May 1.

My friend Lady Z. has written to offer me her carriage for to-morrow, and I think it will add to the interest of my long-promised party if we drive down first to Roehampton, as she suggests, lunch in her garden, and fill our baskets with rhododendrons. Kind Aunt Josephine has asked leave for the children to come; and my friend Fina and her mother are to join the little expedition. Last night, as I was going up to my room, I met Fina blushing and with entreating looks. The landlady's little boy was at home for the holidays. He was such a good little boy, and helped his mother with the knives and boots. Might he come for a drive on the box?

Fina's eyes danced with delight when I agreed to this arrangement. My preparations of cold chicken and salad are all made, and nicely packed by the landlady, whose

little son Dan is also, I do believe, to be parboiled for the occasion, brushed, and scrubbed, and trussed.

May 2.

Is there anything so sweet, so hopeful as an early spring morning without cold wind or spite in the air—only a gentle awakening to sunshine and cheerful sounds? The birds have been singing since the dawn; the trees and green plants have come out with a new flood of colour; London puts on its loveliest spring veils and lights, and tosses its blue sky with floating clouds; the parks are a burst of perfume and May essence; the shrubs glow with white and crimson; the very streets are abloom! Just now, when I looked out from my window, I saw two ragged figures dragging a flower-cart—a creaking load of gold and dazzling colour—at which everyone turned to look. These were only itinerant flower-dealers; but Titania herself could not have conjured up a more lovely rainbow. The passers-by stopped to look; the little girl from below ran out and changed her coppers for lovely new lamps of white narcissus—of pale blue hyacinth. I saw a bunch in Mrs. Arnheim's waistband when she came out all ready for our start. She also was dressed in muslin with a pretty straw hat tied under her chin, and a look of youth and enjoyment in her gentle grey eyes which I had scarcely ever seen before. She sprang into the carriage almost as eagerly as little Fina herself. The coachman pulled my hamper up beside him on the box; Dan

followed the hamper; the horses, with a great deal of clattering and jumping, set off; the sun made merry all along the way as we drove by the pleasant old roads that lead from London to the river and beyond it. I specially remember two red cows eating dazzling green grass under a staring pink apple-tree. 'Look at the flower-tree,' said little Josie, pointing. She was the youngest of the party, and chattered unceasingly for us all.

'What a funny name Fina is!' said she. 'Have you a real name too?'

'My name is Josephine,' said Fina; 'but papa always calls me Fina.'

'Why, *my* name is Josephine,' said Josie, 'and so is grandmamma's.' And all the children exclaimed.

As the children talked, I looked up and caught a strange, eager, half-hopeful, half-frightened expression in Mrs. Arnheim's face; and all of a sudden I knew who it was she reminded me of at times—who but my sleepy old lady in Old Palace Square?

'What is your name, Mrs. Arnheim?' I asked, with some odd certainty of what her answer would be.

'Mary,' she said, simply; and as she spoke her eyes filled with tears.

After luncheon the children played away to their hearts' content in Lady Z.'s pretty old park. Mrs. Arnheim and I kept to the beaten paths and zinc benches; the children held a happy little woodland court in the shade of

the trees, with music of birds overhead and childish laughter, with many orders and decorations of daisy and of primrose. Josie was enthroned on the branch of an old tree, the others gathered round. Little Dan was allowed to join the sports, and meanwhile Mrs. Arnheim was asking me question after question—who was the little girl called Josephine, who was her grandmother; and as I answered she tried to speak—she faltered, then burst into tears. 'Don't you guess it all?' she sobbed. 'Yes, she is my mother, my own mother. This time, when we came to England I could make no more advances. I had been too bitterly wounded.'

It is difficult to understand how some people can have the courage to be unforgiving, day after day, week after week. They go to sleep, they wake up again; they hear the birds sing; they see the sun shine upon the just and the unjust; a thousand blessings are theirs; but still they hold out and refuse their own blessing to the offenders. They hear of sorrows that can never be healed; they hear of joys befalling their fellow-men; they realise life and death, and it does not occur to them that there is no death like that of coldness and estrangement. Against the inevitable, warm hearts can hold their own; but the avoidable, the self-inflicted pangs and mutilations of life, what is there to be said for them? This kind old lady, Mrs. Ellis by name, who was good to the poor, thoughtful for her dependents, affectionate to her friends, showed a stern

and unforgiving spirit towards one person which seemed utterly at variance with her whole life and nature. This one person was the daughter she had loved best of all her children, who had left her home one day, and married without her mother's consent. Arnheim had been Mary's music-master. The family could not forget it.

All the way home I sat turning over one scheme and another in my mind for bringing the mother and daughter together without any chance of interference from the Colonel or Miss Ellis. Miss Josephine I knew would help me, but she was young and timid, and it seemed to me safest to act on my own responsibility.

Mrs. Arnheim had lent me her parlour for tea. It was pleasanter than mine, and opened on the garden; and as we were all eating our bread-and-butter and strawberries Arnheim looked in. I saw him give a quick, anxious look at his wife, who sat silent and with a drooping head.

'Here is papa,' cries Fina; 'now he will play to us. Papa, they do want to hear some music. Please, play, and we will dance mulberry-bush in the garden, and Dan shall come too.'

'I want Dan to go for a message for me first,' said I, a vision of the Colonel's wrath rising before my eyes if Dan were allowed to dance in the ring with the other children.

'Dear Mrs. Ellis,' I wrote, 'would you be so very good

and kind as to come in for five minutes, and see my happy little party. Yours sincerely, MARY WILLIAMSON.'

After a time the children became riotous over their mulberry-bush game, and Arnheim began to play another measure, and then by degrees they quieted down and came to the window to listen. Dan and Edgar exchanged a few cuffs in the twilight; the little girls listened; and I sat wondering what was to come of my note.

Presently there was a ring at the door, and I thought I could recognise the soft, lagging step of the old lady from the square.

'See who it is,' I whispered to Mrs. Arnheim, who looked surprised, but got up quietly and went to the door. I followed her. The passage was dark, but the garden door was open, and the old lady had passed on to the garden door.

Then I heard a little cry from one or from the other —I know not which it was; their two voices sounded so alike.

'Oh, mother!' said Mrs. Arnheim, springing forward, with both hands wildly put out.

'Mary! You! My child!' said the aged woman, surprised and overcome; and the two women were locked together in a long close embrace. And then the two hearts so cruelly parted were beating together once more. . .

Neither the Colonel nor Miss Ellis could keep them

asunder now. Tighter and closer the mother clasped her daughter; those fast enclosing arms clung to the truth, to the reality of life, to the love of past years. Mrs. Ellis was near the end of her long journey. Was she to let her child go now that she had found her again?

Arnheim, meanwhile, went on playing, quite unconscious of the scene just outside the door. He quietly travelled to the end of his melody. His beautiful music seemed singing in measure to that best and holiest strain of peace and reconciliation.

FINA'S AUNT

SOME PASSAGES FROM MISS WILLIAMSON'S DIARY

I.

From Miss Sophy King in Switzerland to Miss Williamson in Old Street, London, W.

'Dearest Miss Williamson,—Your two letters have come flying through the ravines and over the waterfalls, and the sunlight on the plains and the half-way storms, and through all the freshness as well as the less agreeable whiffs from the village. We are very comfortably encamped at our hotel; mamma is wonderfully well for her. My father is in Scotland, but we are not lonely, and have found several friends here. Chief among them are *your* friends the Arnheims, who only went down to Interlaken this morning — we follow on Monday. Mr. Arnheim has an engagement to play at the concerts there. Fina, the little girl, has started up wonderfully, and reaches her father's shoulder. I told her I should be writing to you, and she sent you her love and begged me to tell you that she mends her father's clothes now, and adds up the bills, and keeps all the money. She has grown very like her poor mother, whom I remember seeing at your lodgings in Old Street. I wonder if those very disagreeable people, her relations, are living near

you still: that pompous Miss Ellis and the Colonel, and the silent younger sister and the delightful old lady: and I wonder if you, too, are in your usual corner, where I can see you as plainly as I can see mamma in her chair on the terrace opposite. This is written from a broad green balcony overhung with clematis: all the people come out of the dining-room and sit here to look at the mountains.

'The day the Arnheims were here they took me out for a long day in the mountains. Mr. Arnheim led the way, Fina and I followed. One cannot talk, but one goes on climbing ever through changing lights, from one height to another, higher and higher still. We left autumn at the foot of the mountain, and after a time found ourselves in summer and spring once more. Far above, striking the blue sky, hung winter snows and crystals, but round us was spring. A flood of fragrant Alpine flowers spread by every rocky ridge, along every Alp and plateau, rhododendrons crimson incandescent; violets and saxifrage, and light iris lilies with a delicate pale fragrance; mountain moss and wild azalea, all indescribably faint and beautiful. It seemed as if our souls and senses were refreshed and purified by this calm ether, and able to receive the sacrament of nature, the outward sign and the inward grace. Far beyond one blazing slope of green and crimson studded flowers, and across the vast valley, rose the great might and silence of the mountain-

chain, and higher still a line of clouds was striking sail in solemn rank and drifting towards the peaks. A sense of awe-stricken, all-embracing beauty, of all-enclosing power and mystery, came upon us as we stood together. I felt as if I had lived for years alone with Fina and her father. He, too, seemed to feel some of the same companionship, for he turned from her to me and said very gently:

'"Fina will never forget our walk together, nor the wonderful things we have seen to-day. My old violin has often talked of it, but it never showed us what we have seen to-day." And then with a half-sigh, "How her mother would have enjoyed it all," he added.

'But though we all enjoyed our walk, it was too long. Mr. Arnheim was ill for two days, I am sorry to say; Fina and I have scarcely been beyond the green terrace of the hotel since then. I am not romantic as you know, and so I like sitting where I can see the roads, and the people passing. There go two Swiss maidens. I wish I could draw them for you. They seem to be carrying two of the mountains on their backs. I don't know whether they are going to set them down in sight of the new hotel or elsewhere. Now our artist goes by. He is a Mr. Bracy, and staying in the hotel. He walks about with his head on one side, and his portfolio under his arm. Sketching in such a place as this seems to me a ludicrous process. You might as well attempt to sketch a sonata with a penny whistle as to set down the Eiger on one page and

the Wetterhorn and its crown of cloud on another. There would be some sense in it if he were to draw that nice load of wood and its white horse.

'I don't know how to describe everything here. Life begins at dawn and goes on till starlight. The terrace itself is rather a choking place, scented with heavy perfumes, but through its green windows and delicate curtain of hanging tendril and white blossom, a great sight is revealed. Rise, noble Eiger, with dizzy heights and battlements piled against time, against men, against winds and storms and seasons. There broods frozen winter, eternally arrested on the summit. As for the autumn in the valley, it is a lovely and plentiful show; yellow crops not all reaped yet, bronzed ears and sheaves in the homestead, flax swinging from the galleries of the châlets, cut wood for winter piled against the outer walls. The roar of the torrent is in the air, and mingles with the pastoral sounds. All over Switzerland the rush of running water echoes, from the desperate streams that course in the valleys, to the sweet high mountain rivulets flashing their way to the plain.

'There is one solemn end to our terrace, the other clatters with knives and forks, and is within view of the narrow village street. A deep gutter has been cut in the centre of the road, crossed at intervals by foot-stones. The children, with their brown faces and white heads, sit swinging their bare legs over the water; they stand on

the steps of the châlets, they peep from crazy balconies that start from every corner, loaded with green and crimson flower-pots; and then there are figures everywhere climbing ladders, leaning from upper windows, as they do in German picture-books. A horse led by a baby comes to drink at the trough at the corner of the road; a go-cart rolls by, dragged by a pretty young mother—she has tied her child by a linen cloth to the shafts; the baker shuffles from beneath his gable, our host of "The Bear" appears for a moment in his doorway. Opposite is the country coffee-house, with "Milk and Beer Shop" painted in rude letters over the doorway; and through the open lattice and behind the red curtains you see the country-folk refreshing themselves at wooden tables. Bowls piled with beautiful red and gold are set before them. It is only a feast of apples, but Paris himself might have plucked them. The Golden Age never produced a more sumptuous crop, blazing crimson and lighting the dark kitchen. Then, beyond all the clamour of the little village, the voices, the bleating of goats, the splashing of waters, you come upon the little church, silent in its slated nightcap, watching over the tranquil graveyard where people lie asleep, as befits good reformers, not beneath the shadow of the cross, but under strange tabernacles and devices, among weeds and flowers, with the rocks of the Fishhorns to bound the view and the valley opening to the westward.

'You see I have taken the opportunity of your absence to rhapsodise a little. How glad we should all be if there was any chance of your coming, if only for a fortnight. We will use all our influence with Mr. Gredig's sallow son to get you a room on the proper side of the house, with the view. Do think of it and of all you will have to write down in your beloved diary.

'Always your most affectionate

'Sophy King.'

II.

I have almost made up my mind to burn my diaries. I have been looking them over to-night, and there they are lying in a heap, a cairn upon the floor. Each year passing by has added its stone. My neighbour, Josephine Ellis, came in to see me, and exclaimed at the pile. I told her it was the funeral pyre of my familiar blue devils. There they were, all dated and docketed. 'Have you never kept a diary?' I asked.

'What should I put into a diary?' said she. 'Nothing ever happens in our house. I was quite glad when the little page-boy tumbled downstairs yesterday, and broke the teacups. But Bessie has matched them already, and everything is the same again as ever.'

'I don't write my diary when I have anything better

to do,' I replied. 'It is only when you are a very long time without coming to see me, or when Sophy King does not write, that I have recourse to it.'

Living alone as I do, busy and trudging about all day with my lessons, and tired at night, most of my dissipation comes to me in the shape of pen and ink. For my public opinions, indeed, I subscribe to the *Daily News*; but for my private feelings I have long kept a diary. The extra blank sheets are very convenient to vent one's moods upon, and there is a certain amusement in the *£ s. d.* column, down which the figures go tumbling headlong to the terrible total at the bottom. But I confess that, with the best good will in the world, there are times when a clean ruled page is not much comfort, when a well-balanced column is of little avail, when what you want is a voice—a hand, rough or clumsy though it be—something alive that is not the eternal reflection of your own self in the glass or on the paper before you. In many ways, however, I am well contented with my lot. It seemed a hard one at first, and perhaps things don't change; but one suits oneself to the circumstances round about one. In comparing one life with another people often forget to take states of mind into consideration, and do not realise how habit and natural adaptability often make a sort of artificial happiness when none other might seem possible. 'Leave human nature alone,' said a French lady two hundred years ago, 'and it will make some happiness for itself

out of the things round about it.' In many ways I like the monotonousness of my existence, my early walks, my return home. I have friends without a name who look a kindly greeting; I have a correspondent to whom I owe many a happy half-hour; I live a great deal outside my quiet room as well as in it. My landlady keeps my home bright for me and in good order, and welcomes me back to cheering cups of unstinted bohea. In the morning, when I set off on my day's peregrinations, the street looks pleasant if the sun shines, and friendly even in the mist. It is not one of your dreary, stucco, suburban rows; but a little, old, cheerful, vulgar street, with a certain stir of humanity and life about it, and a barber's shop at the corner.

And here let me note down a curious little discovery I have made since my life in Old Street began. There is nothing in reality more regular than this apparently erratic street life that we see flowing past as though without method or reason; but people whose business takes them at certain hours in certain directions know how the same figures recur at the same places with a curious order and persistence. As I go to my lessons in the early morning I am met again by certain faces at certain corners. Some of them seem friends almost after a week or two of silent recognition. I know the trim clerks on the way to their offices, and three organmen who meet under the same tree in Kensington Gardens morning after morning, to settle the

plan of their day's campaign. I disliked them at first, but by degrees became quite interested in their well-being. A pug dog, anxiously followed by a lady and gentleman, always meets me at a certain tree along the path, and looks up in my face inquiringly. At the gate is the apple-woman, sitting at her stall. All these people have become quite habitual and component parts of my mind by degrees. We meet in sunshine; we meet in rain. Shall I ever forget one lovely morning when some miracle had been worked for us, and the mists had descended in a silver vapour, through which we humdrum people drifted, silently appearing, vanishing, transfigured in a pale dazzling cloud of light? Another day was even more beautiful, when the whole world of the Gardens suddenly flashed into glittering, diamond-like hoarfrost, every blade and twig, every dead leaf, every iron railing touched by this magic. But these are holidays. Who does not know London's workaday livery of heavy, dull grey, the laurel bushes and trees of changeless hue, the dark, straight rows of smut and brick? The skies seem made of bricks, the houses of smut and mist. The world goes out suddenly; the beautiful, shining, gay world, all alight and alive, all full of the voices of children and the hum of strollers, seems blown out with a puff; and the people are gone too. One day you are walking in company with a thousand bustling fellow-creatures, in windy, sunshiny places, where the very stones at your feet are shining and full of hope; the next,

you are plodding—no, not plodding, it is too hopeful a word—you are standing still on one foot, shuddering, and not knowing where to step next.

The weather of our souls is not altogether unlike this outward weather which is supposed to affect our bodies more especially. People say that music only can express certain moods and things. Weather seems to me to have a language of its own which everybody understands, even animals, and even growing things as well as philosophers and idiots. Governesses should be philosophers, I suppose, but I am afraid my poor little pupils, who are everything but idiots, tell which wind is blowing not from personal but from reflected experience. Clang! clang! clang! the bell shakes in the east wind, and jars and jars the unfortunates who are of irritable nerve and temper, and who are condemned to come out in it while the grim reverberations smite and swing and strike those who are already stricken. Happy, and comfortable, and thick-skinned people do not feel such passing sounds and influences any more than children do. Alas! for the nervously irritable, there is a whole world of undiscovered misery, of chill atmospheres, of impatient annoyances, into which they drift. And those who fall victims to these idiotic demons, mere soulless worries of the moment without meaning or tragedy to dignify their pranks—demons with whom battle is ignominious and victory almost as unworthy as defeat—may well grudge the precious hours

of life that pass struggling with minor and intolerable worries.

I remember meeting Josephine Ellis in the east wind one day at the street corner, and being quite frightened by her face, it looked so grey, so set, so utterly stony and miserable. I spoke to her, but she didn't notice me and hurried on. The church bells were clanging overhead, and the clouds tossing up into the high blue sky. The sky always looks highest at the corner just by the steeple, where all the roads meet, where the cabs and carts cross each other's track, and one old street goes winding uphill by the church, while the other meanders off into the country, past the suburban gardens and villas, past Hammersmith and its bridges and stagnant ditches, into the open fields. Another road joining on to this one, goes back to the very heart of London, with a steady rumbling pulse of cabs, carts, carriages, all laden. Besides these, there was the foot-stream, into which I saw Josephine engulfed.

I watched her tall, quick figure sliding through the crowd. She was dressed all in black, for the family were still in mourning for poor Mrs. Arnheim, the second daughter, who died abroad the year before. Josephine in her flowing robes was a noble-looking woman, with a lovely mouth and a hooked nose, not a snub like her sister Bessie's: nor was her hair red, but black, waving and frizzling like the Greek ladies' hair on the coins. Her face is often grey, often dull. It was bright enough when I knew her

first, seven years before she passed me in the east wind that day. Long afterwards she came and told me what had happened that day, and my heart sank for her.

She has an odd hard plausible way of relating the most intimate things. Her manner is at times just like her sister Bessie's, and I could shake her for it, but her looks are Mrs. Arnheim's, who is gone, and her heart is her own ; faithful, gentle, diffident, reserved, unchanging. Poor Josephine! How I should have liked to see her happier! She said that, as she hurried along on that bewildering walk through the crowd, the sound of the church bells seemed to be her own story proclaimed in some noisy, obstreperous fashion: 'Away with him! Away with him! Go! Go! Go! Go! Go! Send him off!' the bells had seemed to say while she pushed quickly forward, not letting herself dwell on much else beyond the difficulty of passing in and out among the many people, who were crowding the narrow pavement. To her it was all like a dream from her own heart, and she wondered to find herself quite alone in this crowd, elbowing, shouldering, pushing, while all the while the incessant bell kept up its maddening clang of parting.

III.

Josephine Ellis at thirty might have been a handsome happy woman, with a home and more to do than she

could find time for, with many cares and anxieties, and a thousand things to occupy her, with a child or two to tend, or with small means perhaps to eke out to the uttermost (which is in itself a profession), with cheerful noise and bustle in her life, and plenty of coming and going, of healthy fatigue and peaceful rest—all this might have been hers, and besides and beyond it all a blessing of faithful love and companionship; but, unfortunately for herself, she was of good family, well-connected, accustomed to every comfort, devoted to her mother, yielding and obedient to the elder sister, who had ruled the house ever since Josephine could remember. A shabby middle-aged doctor of humble extraction, without any practice to speak of, and with a patched and shabby home in Pimlico, was not to be welcomed as a husband, except in defiance of every law which she had been brought up to look upon as sacred. She had been little more than a child at the time of her sister Mary's elopement, but she could remember the dismay it caused. Poverty she did not fear (though she somewhat exaggerated its terrors), but remorse she feared, and renewed anguish for her mother; and she dreaded her sister's blame and her friends' shoulder-shrugs. And then he, though so poor, though of such humble origin, ventured to reproach her; he was rude, he was angry. 'If she loved him, why did she hesitate?' he asked; 'if she did not love, it was *he* who would wish to break it off. She must face it; she must be perfectly

simple and honest about it.' His vehemence filled her with fears of what he might demand from her in the future.

It is not one of the smallest difficulties of life, that of being perfectly true and single-minded in the midst of a great network of influences, of which the ropes and strings and threads pull from generations and generations back, and spread out in every direction. When Josephine broke off her engagement, she scarcely knew what she was doing. She hoped things would come right. She said one thing, she meant another; she did what seemed to her best, but her heart resisted. Josephine was weak, afraid of the Colonel and Bessie, and full of tender solicitude for the dear old mother who loved her children, but whose love and longing for their happiness only seemed in one way or another to bring so much trouble and sorrow upon them. 'He' said she did not love him enough. It might be so. She had seen him a dozen times, perhaps, but it seemed to her she knew every look and line in his face as well as she did her mother's well-loved seams. When he was angry with her, she felt angry for him, angry with herself. Ah! if he thought she did not love him enough, it was better for him to be free, and not tied to a half-hearted woman. So Josephine said 'Good-bye.' It was easily done; too easily done, she thought. She wrote to her lover to meet her in Kensington Gardens that east-windy autumn day, and there, by the pond, among babies and nursemaids, to

the plash of the dull ripples, and to the sound of the children's voices, and the greedy gabble of the waterfowl, with mists rising blue against the stems of the trees, she let his warm hand drop and turned away alone, strangely light of heart as people are who have made up their minds, very sad as a woman may well be, who is turning away from life's happiness, from its cheer and interest, to a chamber, swept, indeed, and garnished, and empty.

It is true there are married people and unmarried ones in the world, and some of the married live utterly alone, and some of the unmarried have their hearts full and overflowing, and live married to the lives and interests of others. But Josephine Ellis was not one of these. She had not energy of character or force of will enough to compel circumstances. She was going home to a lonely life, and she knew it. She had spared her mother a cruel pang, and she grudged it. She had sent him from her, and it was she would remember and he who would forget in time. This also she knew and accepted. But presently as she walked along and the bells began to clang aloft once more, every note seemed to her like a crash of pain falling on her heart,—every stroke seemed to buffet, to bewilder her. She could have cried out loud, only she was too well brought up to make a disturbance in the street, and so she trudged on, crossing the road under a horse's nose and heedless of the driver's cry. As she was turning the corner of the street that leads to her home in

Old Palace Square, she saw some little children in rags with fluttering pinafores, dancing hand-in-hand to the tune of the very bells that sounded to her like a knell. Then she reached home at last. There was the house with its broad front and usual row of windows, the blinds were not down, there were no mutes standing at the door to show to others that a second funeral had taken place, that a tender friendship was dead and buried away by the Round Pond.

A long time of waiting followed, while she hoped, she knew not what, and nothing came of her hopes; and then she began to be afraid, but nothing happened. Then she thought she hated John Adams (that was the Doctor's name), until one day by chance she saw him in the distance, a long way off, at the end of a street; and then she felt her whole heart melt with forgiveness. But he did not see her, and walked on his way.

Facts cannot be changed, but in time we can change ourselves, with help from new things to push away the old ones; but for poor Josephine, so few new things or thoughts or events came to make a difference, that at thirty she was the same woman she had been at twenty-five, less five years of hope, and youth, and confidence. She did not fall ill, but she dimmed as people do. Her brightness faded, and her hair fell out of its pretty crisp waves.

'She wants change,' said Bessie the tyrant, sharply,

when she saw her mother anxiously watching Josephine with soft squirrel-like eyes. 'Thomas is going abroad. Let her go with him.' But Josephine protested she did not want anything, only to be left alone.

Thomas was Josephine's and Bessie's elder brother. He had retired from the army with a colonelcy when he married the second time, and had settled down as a country gentleman in Sussex. On the present occasion he had got a cough, which gave him and his good-natured wife no little anxiety, and had come up to town to consult a doctor about it. The starched colonel had been struck with the change in Josephine, and complained of her dress to his wife.

'Josephine don't make anything of herself,' he said; 'she was a pretty girl not long ago, but now she is a perfect scarecrow. My mother looks the youngest of the two. I wish you would give her a hint or two, Rosa.'

But, notwithstanding Rosa's excellent hints, Josephine's complexion did not improve.

I have vagued away in a sort of circle round my diaries still heaped on the floor, and Josephine standing between me and the lamp. She was perfectly composed, and looked as if she had never done anything but tie her bonnet-strings. The window was open, and the huge still stars were glowing over the opposite house, the lighted panes of which looked like lanterns.

'I am waiting for a servant to fetch me,' said

Josephine. 'Thomas and Bessie won't let me stir without one, and it isn't worth a battle. One thing more,' she added, 'I wanted to tell you. I have had a letter from Fina, and a few lines from her father. He persists in refusing to let us send him one farthing of Mary's money. I think it is very wrong. He drags this child from place to place, and lives in a strange, miserable, hand-to-mouth way, when he might have enough, and welcome.'

'My dear,' said I, 'don't ask me what I think. No wonder Mr. Arnheim is sore, remembering how he has been treated. An honest man doesn't like to be so treated. Your brother once called him "adventurer" to his face.'

'He calls him "that fiddler" now,' said Josephine, with a faint smile. 'He seems to think it equally disgraceful, and is quite furious because Mr. Arnheim won't take the money. Ah! it is true what you say, honest men can't bear such mean suspicions. Do you know,' she went on, 'I sometimes think, if it had not been for Bessie and Thomas, who always agrees with her, we might have all made it up years before our poor Mary died. I sometimes think things might be different, even now. But oh! Mary ought not to have left us as she did,' the girl continued with a sudden outburst of emotion. 'It half killed mamma, and she would have died, I know she would have died, if I too had deserted my post.'

I scarcely knew how to answer Josephine's outburst. She stood trembling for an instant, and then all the

moment's emotion seemed to pass away, and there again stood the set, handsome, fashionable goddess I was used to see. The gods, we know, are forbidden to weep, and perhaps some such decree had been issued to the Ellis household, for Josephine forced back her tears.

At that instant an interruption came in the shape of a crash outside the door. Mrs. Taplow looked in demurely.

'Miss Ellis's servant has come, ma'am. The poor boy has met with an accident over the bannisters. He don't seem *much* hurt,' added Mrs. Taplow considerately, for fear we should be alarmed.

IV.

People bestow strange gifts, and leave odd legacies behind them, which are not mentioned in their wills nor taxed by a paternal government. Besides his money in the funds, his landed estates, his handsome family plate, Mr. Ellis had left his temper to his two eldest children. The two younger daughters, Josephine and Mary, took after their mother. Josephine succumbed to the family demon, and poor Mary had fled from it with Francis Arnheim, the 'adventurer,' as Thomas called him. The story of her marriage was a dreary one; but it contained one little episode, which has been told elsewhere, and which I cannot think of still without some emotion—a meeting, a reconciliation, when mother and daughter, after

years of estrangement, by a happy chance, ran into one another's arms one summer evening. Mary was forgiven, but that was all. Her family would not accept her husband, and she, being a proud woman and true wife, went away with him once more, and not very long afterward had passed beyond all estrangement and all reproach. She died at Munich, tenderly watched and cared for to the last. The poor musician remained abroad; he could not face the people who had made his wife unhappy for so long; he could scarcely forgive her mother. Josephine, the youngest sister, who had been faithful in a timid way, was the only one of the family he ever wrote to. He would touch none of poor Mary's money. He could keep the child, he said; the interest of her mother's fortune might accumulate. Fina would some day appreciate her little fortune, the more because her up-bringing had been modest. A musician's life belongs to towns, and Arnheim wandered about Europe with his violin and his little daughter, from one city to another, from one concert to another, carrying his loneliness and his patient music. He was not a great musician. He was a conscientious and painstaking man. With Mary he had been happy, and purposefull, and hard-working. Without her he was all lost and at sea.

I could understand what had occurred at the time of Mary Arnheim's marriage, when I heard the Colonel and his sister talking about Josephine one day. I had gone

with a message to Old Palace Square. It seemed as if it were some grim rehearsal going on of what had happened there before. After all, events are only combinations out of people's own characters, thoughts and wishes. Again and again we watch the same histories repeating themselves, and one day we discover, to our surprise, how large a share we have had ourselves in things which have befallen us apparently from without.

When I called on that occasion, Josephine had gone off to some week-day service, of which there are a great many at our Parish Cathedral. The peaceful old lady in her soft Indian shawls sat, owl-like, in her corner, watching us sleepily. The Colonel was pacing the room and announcing, with immense decision, that he was going to the Club. Bessie was finishing her notes at the writing-table. You had only to look at her back as she sat unflinchingly dotting, crossing, and despatching her missives to see what a fund of energy was strapped in with her leather belt and silver chains. The Colonel's wife, who had been an heiress and accustomed to her comforts, was lying on the sofa, uttering the most placid audacious suggestions.

'But after all, if Josephine wished it, why didn't she have him?' said Mrs. Colonel to her mother-in-law.

'As it happens, she didn't wish it,' said Bessie, suddenly joining in, and flinging the words over her shoulder. 'Josephine never wished to leave her mother; and I don't know why Rosa should interfere.'

'Interfere!' said Rosa, who had a sort of feather-bed manner when Bessie attacked her. 'Interfere? I only asked a question. What is he like, Bessie dear?'

'I cannot tell you. He is no friend of mine. Josephine made his acquaintance at the hospital, and not under her own mother's roof.'

'It don't do; it don't do!' the Colonel said, stopping short in his perambulations, and settling himself in his tight coat. 'Young ladies shouldn't meddle with hospitals and doctors. They are all very well in their proper place, and a man may do as he likes; but a lady should always have some one with her—a servant, if nobody else can go.'

This sapient remark was greatly approved by Miss Ellis, who emphatically endorsed it with 'That is also my humble opinion. So I have always said from the first.'

'A servant! That might be very awkward,' said Mrs. Thomas, reflectively.

As she spoke, the door opened and the red head of Hoopers, the page boy, who had been specially engaged to chaperone Josephine, appeared in the door. 'If you please, Miss,' said Hoopers mysteriously, 'there's a gentleman rung at the bell. He asked if the family were alone, and I told him as how Miss Josephine was out. So he said as how Miss Ellis will do, and I thought as——'

'What is all this?' says Miss Ellis, wheeling round. 'Go down directly, Hoopers, and send Burroughes up.'

'Please'm, Mr. Burroughes, he have a friend dropped in—he says as how he can't be rung up no more.'

'I had better see about it, Bessie,' said the Colonel, briskly marching off, delighted at having something to do.

'No, Thomas,' said Miss Ellis. 'This is a woman's province. I will speak to Burroughes. Show the gentleman into the library, Hoopers.'

Here Hoopers, who was certainly a very vulgar boy, began making signals with his thumb and winks and signs over his shoulder to indicate that the stranger was close behind him, and the Colonel, who had gone to the door, ran up against a tall loose-jointed man, who had come up and now confronted the Colonel somewhat cavalierly.

I could guess who it was. A man about forty, rather shabbily dressed, with hair already turning grey, and a brown hatchet face. When he spoke, some slight north-country tone betrayed him, but his voice was low and deep and his words measured. He did not seem in the least disconcerted by the phalanx of ladies and arm-chairs, nor by the commanding aspect of the Colonel. He looked round quietly, with bright, shaggy eyes.

'I asked for Miss Ellis,' he said. 'I was told Mrs. Ellis was an invalid. My name is John Adams. You may have heard of me from——'

'From my sister Josephine,' the Colonel answered haughtily. 'It is perhaps just as well she is out. If you will come down with me, Mr.—Dr. Adams——'

'I have nothing to say to you in private,' said the shabby man, looking doubtfully at the spruce one. 'I wanted to speak to Mrs. Ellis.'

'My mother, as you know, is an invalid, and must be spared discussion,' said Miss Ellis. 'Anything you may wish to say will be listened to elsewhere.'

'Why not here?' said the old lady, seemingly interested, and speaking very vigorously, while, to my amusement, Mrs. Thomas rose from the sofa, came forward, and said in her most languid tones: 'Be so good as to come a little nearer. Mrs. Ellis is rather deaf.'

'I don't know why my coming should trouble you, ma'am,' said the Doctor, striding up the room, and utterly ignoring the two wardens at the door (where, by the way. I could see that little wretch Hoopers grinning). 'What I want to say is soon said. I admire your daughter very much, and I asked her to marry me, as you may perhaps have heard. There seemed to be family difficulties which at the time I did not sufficiently allow for, and I am afraid I was impatient and harsh. It has since occurred to me that, perhaps, as you did not know me, you imagined I was behaving in an underhand way. I therefore determined to come and ask you for her hand before speaking to her again; and now I hope I may be allowed to see Josephine when she comes in.'

'Oh, no, no, no,' cried the old lady nervously, and greatly startled. 'Pray don't do anything of the sort.'

And Miss Bessie, recovering herself, came quickly to the rescue.

'You are very much in error if you imagine any representations you can now make will influence my sister's feelings. She has assured us that her mind is made up, and that she has plainly and positively told you so.'

'Are you quite sure her mind is made up?' said Rosa, once more reflective.

'Perfectly certain,' said Miss Ellis.

'And you must allow me to add,' cried the Colonel bursting in, 'that I heartily congratulate her on her good sense. It is a most unsuitable match for a girl of her position.'

'There is no matter for congratulation, if what I hear be true,' said the Doctor haughtily. 'I have no doubt we should not suit each other in the least. I came in perfect sincerity to you and yours, and I have been received with impertinence. You may tell her I shall not trouble you or her with any more advances. If she changes her mind she can let me know.' And he turned and marched out of the room without another word.

'Well, I do feel small,' said Mrs. Thomas.

There was a dead silence. Then the storm broke. Miss Ellis burst forth in her fury at me, at her sister-in-law, at the unlucky Burroughes, who was rung up and rung down. When Josephine came home from church, poor Mrs. Ellis was in hysterical tears; Mrs. Thomas had

locked herself into her room; the Colonel was fussing and fuming like the funnel of a steam-engine.

Her mother clung to Josephine. 'Oh, take me to my room, take me to my room. Don't leave us alone. Bessie is so angry, poor dear! That dreadful man was here and frightened us all, my child.'

'What did he say, mamma?' said Josephine.

'He called us impertinent. He——Oh, my Josephine, do not leave me.'

'Let us forget him altogether,' cried Miss Ellis. 'Never let me hear his name any more.'

Miss Ellis might say what she liked, but we all remembered our visitor, and not without a certain respect. John Adams was not one of those men who are forgotten as soon as their backs are turned. To be remembered is a gift in itself of vital worth to those whose business it is to lead others. John Adams had a great reputation as a lecturer, and his pupils opened their eyes, mouths, ears, at what he said that week in the lecture-hall in the great London Hospital to which he belonged. What had come to him? He was eloquent enough, but sarcastic, irate, intolerant. They hardly recognised him.

I saw Josephine again after this, but I found her very reserved and evidently disinclined to speak of what had happened. When I ventured to say a word she stopped me at once.

'Pray, dear Miss Williamson, do not speak of it any

more. I should not be happy. You see what a life it would be for my mother without me. He will forget all about it very soon.'

Perhaps she was right; and yet, at John Adams' age, time is short, and new impressions are not easily made. With older people fidelity is a habit as well as a quality.

Mrs. Thomas Ellis came to see me one Sunday, on her way from church, in most gorgeous array. She looked like a sort of Catherine-wheel of satin, touched up with gold braid. She was evidently anxious to talk it all over.

'I don't at all agree with the Colonel. Bessie is behaving most ridiculously,' said the lady. 'What do they expect? Everybody can't be rich, and Josephine might do a great deal worse. I hope Dr. Adams will come and pay us a nice long visit at Cradlebury. I shall get the Colonel to persuade him.'

'The Colonel!' said I.

'Thomas is *very* good about doing what one wishes when he is left to himself. It is such waste for dear Bessie to take so much trouble about him. But what has become of Dr. Adams? I can't hear anything of him. I believe he is gone away.'

The Doctor had vanished, but he re-appeared before long —oddly enough, in Sophy King's correspondence.

V.

Sophy King was a great favourite of mine, and her letters were always welcome when they arrived with their odd-looking stamps, whether cross keys of Rome or fierce mustachios of Italy, or Liberty with scales and outstretched arms.

Sophy was evidently very much taken with the Arnheims. Her letters were full of them. 'We had a delightful ride from Grindelwald,' she wrote; 'as we were trotting down the road we met Fina and her father, who had come half-way to meet us. I left mamma with her maid in the carriage, and walked back with them by a pretty cross-road Fina had discovered. She looked like a little Proserpine with a great lapful of flowers which she had been gathering. She began telling me where each one of them grew and how she had found it. "Don't you like Euphrasia?" she said, holding up a tiny flower; "this grows in the open Alps. Do you know, it is my name as well as Josephine? We call that the Shepherd's Staircase just below." The Shepherd's Staircase consisted of a few rough steps of rock and stone, over which a soft network of moss and creeping bilberry had quickly spread. The girl sprang lightly from one stone to another, but Arnheim sat down to rest for a moment, when we reached the bottom. "Isn't this a pretty place?" said Fina. "Don't

you wish we always lived here, papa, or that there were mountains in the streets?" "The mountain-tops of cities must be in the souls of the men who live there," said Arnheim, looking at her fondly. "Sit down and rest, Fina, you have a long way to go yet." "But why do we always live in towns?" persisted Fina. "Because I make my living by music," said her father, "and musicians must live in cities where there are orchestras and audiences, and where the mountains are mountains of men. Music unheard is not quite born, somehow, like something hoped for but unfulfilled. I don't think," he added, "that anything even in nature is much more glorious than a symphony of Beethoven's, with the pulse of a great audience to beat time to it." "Listen, there is music for you, papa," said Fina laughing, as a ludicrous loo loo loo reached us, sounding from a little châlet on the plateau below, where a valiant tourist who had ordered some gingerbeer was trumpeting to the echoes and the scampering goats.

'The tourist joined our party, and came trudging along with us for company. The day was hot and sultry, and the midges were buzzing about the feet of the mountains. When we reached the valley everything was cool and silent overhead, but the valleys were alive, echoing, flowering, fructifying, and steaming with July. We all came straggling along a lane that lay between two wide châlet besprinkled meadows; a little brook bubbled swiftly along with them; its spray fell upon the grass and flowers.

The afternoon rays were dazzling and bewildering, the mists of heat rose with dull scents from the fields, fresher ether came streaming down from the torrents; we were in a state of vague worry and rapture combined, bitten by midges, dazzled by sudden streams of light, footsore, and splashing among the sparkling pools that lay in their track, but carried on by the sweet and irresistible spirit of this Alpine life. Horses' hoofs were stamped in the road, delicate flowers were starting through the fences, pretty, dirty little children, whose golden crowns of curly hair were sadly in want of burnishing, came out from their barn-like homes, like little living sheaves of Indian corn, carrying flowers and smiling innocently. An old shepherdess in spectacles was turning over the hay in front of her wooden house. Girls with babies in their arms were perched here and there on the balconies; cross lights showed the interiors and figures at work in the rooms within. The goats rang their tinkling bells, but the cows were still up in the mountains.

'Mr. Arnheim and I were tired out before we reached home; he walked along bent and heavy-footed, but Fina seemed quite revived by the sight of the village. I saw more than one person look kindly at her as she passed up the busy street, walking ahead with her flowers, followed by us two weary pedestrians. She walked lightly on, carrying her store, stray fragments from that beautiful earthly rainbow which springs up year by year, as much

the offspring of the sun and rain as those arcs we all love to gaze upon. Fina has, too, sprung up since you saw her last. She has a crop of dark curly hair, a quaint irregular face with a very sweet expression; as for her eyes, they seem to sing and dance to her father's violin, they flash and shine with marvellous brightness. I think Fina's great charm is in her self-confidence, or, rather, in her confidence in others, and her trust in their sympathy. It is a curious quick mind, taking in half-a-dozen things at once; she listens to all the talking all down both sides the table; her father calls her little pitcher; she can spy out strawberries far away twinkling among the rocks, and she recognises little black dots on the mountain side as human beings and friends at a glance. Her father told me that she had such bright eyes as a baby that he christened her Euphrasia for a second name.

'When Fina appears dressed for the *table-d'hôte*, in her white dress with her amber necklace clasped round her throat, and stands there crisp, and clean, and fresh, she looks like her pretty namesake flower alive and chattering.

'We are glad of our white dresses, for it is very hot and sultry here in the valley. As I write, the dinner is over; a sort of sleepy dream touches everything. The sound of the fountain reaches me in my room; how tranquil the water sounds to parched ears. The people of the place don't mind the heat: they go by dragging their

children in little go-carts, or staggering along with hayfields on their heads. Then come mules from the mountain, then a travelling carriage jingles up. Such a carriageful came up to the door just now; an immense and noisy English family whose heels and voices reverberated through the hotel. They were all having tea while some of the company dined at the *table-d'hôte*; brothers, sisters, big boys and little boys, an old aunt or two, nondescript cousins of various ages, two giggling girls, and a huge and good-humoured mother, who seemed to take noise as a matter of course, and who, so long as her plate was duly replenished by the attention of her children, seemed to require nothing else. When a smaller child fell under the table with a crash, she made no remark beyond looking vaguely at one of the daughters; when one of the boys gave a sudden yelp and upset the coffee-pot, this mother of Israel paused for one instant and went on with her bread and butter.

'"Did you see her, papa?" said Fina, laughing; "what a lazy mother! Why, my mother always was thinking of your things and my things. Grandmamma is more like that lady: I could imagine her letting things go. Was mamma very unhappy at home?" the girl asked suddenly, looking up into her father's face.

'"No, my child," her father answered gently; "she was very happy, and always contented, and you must be like her. It was my hasty temper that could not fit itself

to her relations. But she loved them, and for that reason I feel in charity with them now. . . . Your youngest aunt is something like her, I think."

'"Not Aunt Bessie," said Fina, with a sparkle in her dark eyes.

'"Aunt Bessie is the devil," said Arnheim with a wry face, notwithstanding his charity.

VI.

'We all met again that evening at the *établissement*. Fina came with mamma and me. Arnheim was at his post, commanding his little army of violins and violoncellos. The musicians sat in a phalanx on a sort of inclosed stage, brilliantly lighted up. The dark sky overhead was lighted up too, but in a different fashion. A few little stars of cigar ends and cigarettes had fallen into the parterre. The people looked very comfortably established, sitting out in the garden drinking their coffee, and enjoying the music and the cool of the evening. Our noisy family had secured a couple of tables by us, the mamma was installed with a special footstool. There was a cheerful drone of voices; children ran here and there; waiters were darting in and out among the crowd. There are certainly swallows among human beings, as they skim hither and thither, migrating in autumn across the Alps, vanishing for the

winter, and reappearing with the tourists. One of them came flitting up with two excellent cups of chocolate for me and mamma in one hand; in the other he carried a huge tray full of cakes and ices for the family party. The musicians began to play a lovely sort of dance by Schumann; the little boys went on kicking their heels in valiant time to the music; mamma and I sat sipping our chocolate to the very sweetest cadence; Fina was too much excited for cups of any sort.

'"There," said she suddenly; "that stupid cornet has played E flat instead of C sharp. He always does just in that place. Poor, poor papa!"

'Arnheim had turned in warning towards the unlucky cornet, who went on nervously blundering.

'"It is enough to keep my father awake all night," little Fina cried in despair; "you don't know how easily he is made ill—quite ill."

'After the Schumann came a pause; and the stars twinkled for a bit,—then the music began again in a different key. I do not know why Arnheim had selected one of Mendelssohn's Songs without Words—a solemn melancholy march, too sad for the occasion, it silenced the talk.

'"I should say that was the tune the old cow died of." cried one of the young men at the table next ours.

'Fina gave him one look, such a look of scornful, contemptuous indignation. The youth stared, started, got up

uneasily and walked away, with his hands in his pockets, whistling, and in his confusion ran up against a gentleman who was coming through the crowd, marching rather at haphazard, stumbling up against backs of chairs, and over out-stretched legs and sticks.

'Fina, seeing the stranger, forgot her indignation; she too jumped up from her chair, calling out, "Mr. Adams! Mr. Adams! were you looking for me?"

'Mr. Adams is a great friend of the Arnheims. He is a doctor—in small practice, they tell me. He has made all sorts of discoveries in science; but he has never had time to earn any money. He has a lectureship at one of the great London universities. He cured Arnheim once from a dangerous illness. He is quite simple; but he impresses one—I can't tell you why.

'"We must wait to talk till your father has finished what he has to say," this doctor said to Fina; and he stood by her chair while Arnheim played a touching cadence, to which the whole orchestra replied with a lovely sweep of chords. Then came chair-scraping; the swallows rushed about collecting their halfpence, and the concert was over.

'I certainly grow more and more interested in the Arnheims and their friends; even mamma, who is not enthusiastic, has taken to them. I don't know what my father will say when he joins us. Church and State has always been his particular sphere hitherto, and he is very

suspicious of anything outside it. Art and science seem to be naturally opposed to Church and State, don't you think so? and as for all these kind, clever, impulsive people, they have scarcely a white neckcloth among them.

'The concert is all over at ten; and the gaslights go out, and the chairs and tables turn over on their backs and go to sleep. Arnheim came up looking very tired, but he brightened directly at the sight of his friend.

'"You here?" he said. "I imagined you in London. How are the lectures getting on?"

'"I have been enjoying *your* lecture very much," said the Doctor. "I saw the concerts advertised at the station at Basel, and so I came on to find you."

'The people scattered. Some went home; some turned into the *établissement*, which sits up later than the garden. Mamma, strange to say, had a fancy for a stroll. We walked along the avenue, and crossed the road, and the piazza, and the bridge, and got out into the open.

'High, clear, chill, with strange unresponding beauty, the moon shone upon the wide black valley; the waters of the torrent were brawling and circling in cool eddies; some pines crowded dark, and whispered mysteriously fragrant. What was that flash? Some planet changing from rainbow to rainbow. We walked a little way by the rushing stream. It was all dim, noisy, bewildering, and sleepy at once. Weeds floated on the water; the moon floated in the sky. Across the plain rose a shadowy

presence—the Jungfrau—which seemed to face us in some indifferent mood of chilly life. The dew was falling heavily; and I heard Arnheim sigh.

'"Come back," said the Doctor—it was quite a relief to hear his comfortable voice. "It is too dark to stay out any longer."

'Many of the windows of the hotel were lighted up still when we reached it. The porters and waiters were closing for the night. On our way we passed a ground-floor window through which we could see a peaceful interior scene: a little child asleep on a low couch, with all its hair falling upon the pillow; the night-light was shaded; a woman bent over the little one, and then came to the window and carefully drew down the blind.

'In the great *salle* the gas was still flaring. Everybody was gone, and the red velvet sofas were empty. One lady only remained in the great empty room. She was old, painted, and wrinkled; she had a frizz of flaxen tow, cheeks of chalk, eyebrows of black-lead. She was dressed in some grand satin dress, and, as we came in, was kneeling on one of the high red sofas looking at herself fixedly in the glass. I don't know what made Arnheim's friend, the Doctor, give a curious sort of snort.

'"To think," he said, "of some women, and not bad women either, deliberately choosing such a life as that, and giving up everything in the whole world for it!" and then he stalked away.

'But, dear Miss Williamson, it is not true. Women don't deliberately choose; their lives come to them, and they can but take them as they come.'

VII.

I went to show this letter to Josephine, for I knew it would interest her; but she had gone away with her mother for a few weeks, on a visit to Mrs. Thomas at Cradlebury, and I did not send it after her. The Colonel was to stay on with Miss Bessie in London. He had business to attend to before he went abroad. The Colonel's business was always looked upon with great respect by his family. There was not much of it; but what there was always seemed more important than anybody else's. I believe he was engrossed, among other things, in negotiations for the exchange of the old silver tea-urn for a dozen flat candlesticks, the want of which at Cradlebury he felt keenly. Mr. Ellis, the father, had been a collector of old plate, and the spoons and forks in Old Palace Square were certainly a pleasure to contemplate. Burroughes, in spite of his failings, used to rub up his silver to a bright perfection in those underground regions he affectioned. They were long slim spoons and forks with the handles all curled the wrong way, to the delight of the knowing; also the spoons were an egg-shaped and rounded oval, not

pointed as ours are, and heavy and massive to wield. Early Georgian plate had certainly much of the spirit of the powdered and deliberate company for whose mouths it was intended. It did not sprawl into vulgar ornamentations; it did not beat out one solid fork into several flimsy four-pronged impossibilities; it contented itself with three handsome prongs, firmly and massively set, shining and sufficient. But whether it is better that one man should have a handsome fork all to himself, or that two men should enjoy theirs flimsy, is a difficult question.

A comico-tragedy was enacted at Mrs. Ellis's concerning this very plate; for when it came to be counted over, a certain quantity was found to be missing. What there was left was in a beautiful shining condition. But though the moth and rust had been kept at bay, not so the thieves. It was not that which was used every day that was gone, but a certain extra store, which had been fetched from the bank and confided to Burroughes in case of emergency, was found to be deficient. The old fellow's honesty was not to be doubted; he had rubbed these spoons for twenty years, and his life's energy was to be seen twinkling in manifest activity on their handles. He himself had discovered the loss, that otherwise would never have been suspected, and had staggered in, in consternation, to announce it. The police were had in, and their opinion was no doubt very valuable, but did not lead to much. The silver was already melted down, said they; without doubt

it had been stolen by somebody. Miss Ellis and the Colonel were much perturbed at the liberty which had been taken. 'Few people could spare so much plate better than you,' said I, by way of consolation to Miss Ellis. But to this she made no response. I left the poor lady, little thinking what a miserable experience was still in store for her.

Hoopers, who was a youth of an excitable and romantic disposition, seems to have been very much engrossed by this event in the family; and, moreover, having been lately thrilled by various accounts of robberies in the paper and elsewhere, which, in Mrs. Ellis's absence, he had time to ponder on thoroughly, thought this a good opportunity for exercising his ingenuity and venting his feeling against a lady to whom he had taken a dislike. Miss Ellis, it seems, was peacefully asleep in her bed one night, when she was awakened by an alarming apparition of a short figure swathed in a tablecloth, with a crape across its face, which exclaimed in a crowing voice—'Ho, ho, I am the robber. Your money or your life.' The poor lady sprang from her bed with a scream, and in so doing fell to the ground, upsetting the night-light which always burnt at her side. The wretched boy, who had merely intended a wild practical joke, tried to rush from the room, but could not find the door. The maids came down, the Colonel came up from his bedroom on the ground floor in an Indian dressing-gown. Hoopers was caught red-handed,

the police were again sent for, and not only the police. The doctor was also necessary, for Miss Ellis was hurt. Her ankle was badly sprained, and for many weeks she was confined to the sofa. For a person of her energetic temper this was no small infliction.

This absurd piece of news was all I had to send to Sophy in exchange for her faithful long letters. I think she was as glad to write as I to read. Her mother was to her an affection, a tender solicitude, but no companion to the girl. Her only sister was married and away, her father had little sympathy for the things she cared about. The girl was full of interest, emotion, kindness, sympathy, and talkativeness; she wanted a vent, someone to confide in; and her old governess on her second floor was only too glad to respond.

One more letter reached me from Sophy, still engrossed in her new friends.

'Alas! we all part to-morrow. Mamma and I go on to St. Pierre. I don't like saying good-bye. Oh, Miss Williamson, why must one always be saying good-bye? We have all been sitting out for the last time in front of the hotel, watching an odd mixture of elements upon the terrace. Russian human nature, smoking cigarettes, male and female; English human nature, simple and blousy, sitting on the benches, looking at the sky and the people underneath it; French human nature, exchanging good-natured, cheerful greetings, talkings, and laughter. Then

the piano strikes up, and some of them go in and begin to dance. Dr. Adams sat with us for a while. He was saying he could imagine a passion for nature coming late in life to people for whom all other passion was over, especially to women, and that a need for absorbing interest is part of the machinery of life, and does not end with youth. He talks as if he were an old man, but he is really quite young. He hates sitting still, and soon went off straggling down the pathway. Arnheim looked after him and said—

'"I envy him his energy; he will make a name for himself. He has a wonderful gift for discovering work for himself and for helping others with theirs."

'"He ought to be a clergyman," said I.

'"Why should he be a clergyman?" said Arnheim. "The religion of the strong helping the weak is the natural religion all the world over. There need be no paid clergy to teach such a simple doctrine as that. You must not forget us altogether," he added, when he said good-night.

'"There is no fear of that. It has been a real happiness to me to know these good simple people, and I shall always feel as if Fina was a little niece of my own."

'Good-bye from your ever affectionate

'SOPHY.'

Alas! the time came only too quickly for Sophy to prove the reality of her good-will. It was the last day before

the summer holidays began. I had had a long day's work going from school to school, from pupil to pupil. I had been thinking of my own arrangements of Margate or Southend as a convenient change, my wildest ambition reached no farther than Calais or Boulogne. It was a lovely evening, and on my way home I sat down to rest on one of the benches in Kensington Gardens, and watched the sun setting in floods of red behind the old Dutch palace. There I sat feeling a little alone perhaps, as if the shadows were creeping from afar, and might engulf me.

My friends were all away, being amused in company; Miss Ellis had been conveyed to Cradlebury with many precautions; the Colonel was abroad with a Captain, a friend of his; even my three organ-grinders had trudged off to the sea-side, no doubt; and I went homewards dull and out of spirits, little thinking what trouble some of those I most cared for were in.

Mrs. Taplow was standing at my door. 'There's a telegram come for you,' she said; 'a foreign telegram. I have been looking out for you.'

The telegram was from Sophy King at St. Pierre. 'Arnheim dangerously ill at Interlaken. Let some one come to Fina.'

The message seemed to have been delayed, for the date was two days old.

VIII.

Last night, instead of putting out my lamp quietly in my chamber, I found myself far away from Old Street, flying through the darkness and watching the countless lights of London twinkling into the distance. Josephine was beside me, scarcely less emotional and tremulous than when she came hurrying into my room to entreat me to start with her to poor little Fina's help. I had almost expected she would come, and I was ready to set off at once.

Opposite to us sat Pringle, Miss Ellis's maid, with a bulging bag and a packet of shawls. She had been sent as an escort, and it was not without difficulty that poor Josephine had declined the additional protection of Mr. Burroughes' presence on her journey.

A journey is a wonderful, noisy, rattling thing! Wheels, engines, objects of every shape and kind are whirling and tumbling in every direction, in order to carry you whithersoever you want to go. There we sat, side by side, watching the ghosts of trees and hedges fly past the windows, and the dark homesteads and the horizons, and the last pale streaks in the evening sky fading into darkness. The oil-lamp swinging from above lit up my companion's pale face and Pringle's elegant bonnet. It had been Miss Bessie's once, and the worthy woman had a *faux air* of Miss Ellis, not a little alarming at times. It was a

relief to me when she neatly nodded off to sleep, incited by the snores of an old gentleman in the corner, who may have been somebody else's hero perhaps, but who has nothing to do with this story.

Josephine was excited, troubled, moved from her usual composure. She opened her heart to me as we went along, a sad heart full of solicitude and remorse. 'If one knew what was best and did it,' she said, 'nothing else would matter much; but I didn't do it. I didn't do enough for Mary. I might have tried more, done more to influence my mother, held my own against Bessie's strong will—it is rather strong, you know,' she faltered; 'and now poor Francis Arnheim is ill, dying perhaps, and I am only a stranger to little Fina, a new, untried aunt, no familiar home-friend coming to comfort the poor child.'

'My dear,' I said, touched by her natural pathetic voice, 'don't be afraid, don't undervalue yourself, Fina will turn to you. Sophy King has told me that Mr. Arnheim always speaks of you as the person he most looks to to befriend his daughter;' and then, as I said this, I remembered for the first time that Dr. Adams was already there, and that we were travelling after him, as fast as the express train could carry us. Some instinct stopped me as I was on the point of saying so. Poor Josephine had quite enough on her mind, without sentimental scruples superadded.

Paris rolled past us as a morning dream, with fountains

playing and horses' feet and people's voices awakening the streets, and the tower-like houses still closed in morning sleep. Then came a long, long burning day, as we flew across the endlessly stretching plains. We reached Bâle, with its flowing river, late at night. Josephine would have travelled on, had it been possible, but next morning very early we started again.

Though we started early, it was late in the afternoon when we reached Interlaken—our journey's end as we imagined—and found ourselves jolting among the crimson velvet cushions of the omnibus of the Hôtel des Alpes, with its many gilt looking-glasses to reflect our dusty faces. Pringle and the bonnet were especially deplorable objects, though I must do the former the justice to say that she had struggled bravely with fatigue, luggage, and every incidental annoyance. We drove straight to the Hôtel. The day was ending. The sun had set behind the great snowy range. The *table-d'hôte* was just over; a crowd of people were standing about the door; some of them stared at us, some did not even stare. The manager, the waiter, the chambermaid, the porter, all rushed mechanically to receive us. Poor Josephine looked at me, for she could not speak. In answer to my anxious question, they said Mr. Arnheim had stayed there, but it was at Grindelwald the accident had happened. His young lady had been sent for. There had been letters for us, they said, but they understood we were at Grindelwald, and had sent them on. He was

very ill when last they heard, some days ago. It was very unfortunate.

Either the people could not or would not tell us more. Except this dismal fact of an accident, of which the telegram had not warned us, we learnt nothing from them. 'A carriage.' Certainly we could have a carriage, but the road was dark. There was a late *table-d'hôte*. Would we not wait for it, and start next morning?

'A carriage directly,' Josephine cried; 'we will go on at once, if you please.' Pringle gave one gasp of horror, and then stood grasping a parasol, and helplessly looking at me in a mute, piteous condition.

At that moment I remember hearing the distant echo of the music at the *établissement*. What an odd sensation comes over one when one appears to be alone, going against the stream of life! There were we, with all this sorrow before us; there were all these people, only thinking of music and of the passing hour.

Pringle was left behind, to follow in the morning. Josephine and I got into the little *einspanner* with its strong grey horse, and trotted away through the closing twilight. The long cool evening drive was perhaps more restful to us than anything else would have been. We were glad to leave the noisy Hôtel, with its lights and garish company. The roads grew darker and darker, but we had a lantern to light our way; the horse's hoofs sounded sharply on the road, or hollow when they struck a

wooden bridge; the stream went rushing through the black shadows; the trees rustled; winds from mysterious valleys came blowing in our faces; here and there far distant lights flickered from the farmers' châlets. The horse's bells jingled and jangled in a quieting drowsy measure, but poor Josephine's anxiety was too great to let her rest. Now that the long journey was over, now that the end was so near, all her strength too seemed to fail. Neither the fragrant air nor the soothing sounds could reach her. The road seemed interminable. It was almost midnight when at last we reached Grindelwald. As I looked round, in the light of the last lingering village lamps, I might have recognised some of Sophy's descriptions, but my poor companion's anxiety and exhaustion preoccupied me entirely. She was trembling violently. The carriage rolled into a courtyard, where the stars were still alight, though everything there seemed to have been blown out for the night; but at the sound of our carriage wheels a lantern flashed, some one came to a side-door, and opened it. My heart sank, and I seemed somehow to know we were too late.

'Is a gentleman lying here ill?' said Josephine, in an odd husky voice. 'Is Miss Arnheim up? Are we expected?'

'No one is expected,' said the man. 'Will you come in? Come in.' And through the darkness a groping hand was put out.

'We must get out,' said Josephine quietly. 'There is nothing else to be done.' And then, leaning against the doorway, she looked hard at the man's face. The light fell upon her anxious eyes and upon his placid weather-beaten features. He shook his head. 'The young lady was fetched away by her friends to Meyringen,' he said. 'The doctor is come back, he will speak to you.' And he held back the door for us to pass into the hall. Then he kindly and clumsily opened a second door and led us into an empty dining-room, dark and bare, with cleared tables and one dim burning light. 'Sit down,' he said, pulling a chair, into which Josephine sank, very pale, and as if she were going to faint. He patted her kindly on the shoulder. 'I will get you some hot wine,' he said. 'I think the doctor is not yet gone to his room,' he continued; 'he was smoking on the terrace not long ago. The poor gentleman did not suffer long. He was out alone on the glacier. We all know the dangerous place, but he did not. A rock fell from the cliff. Some shepherds found him. He was gone.'

We neither of us spoke. Josephine sat quite still, quite exhausted. It was all over, and she sighed and did not move. Then I heard a door bang, and footsteps. Even at that moment I could not help speculating as to who the doctor might be. Was it the one doctor in all the world best able to help her? Was it, could it be, John Adams? I heard steps again coming nearer and nearer,

and advancing. Then I looked at Josephine, whose face had been turned towards the door, and by her face I knew who it was who came in at that moment. She put up her hands. 'You, John!' she said quite simply, and utterly amazed. Then, as he came up out of the darkness, very grave and silent, holding the pipe which he had been smoking between his fingers, something in his gravity and silence, something in his look, at once touched and softened her tight-bound heart. 'Poor Francis gone—and *you* . . .' She burst into a great flood of warm, passionate tears, and hid her face in the outstretched hands he had not taken.

'I see,' he said, 'you heard the worst. Poor fellow, he only lived a few hours! We laid him in his grave three days ago. I—I have just come from it,' he added quietly.

'And Fina?' I asked, for I saw that Josephine could not speak.

'Poor little Fina! she is with Miss King, at Meyringen. I left her there this morning. We expected you would have gone straight to her. She was not here,' he added, 'when the accident happened. Her father had come up for the day to arrange about some music at the church. Poor Arnheim,' said the Doctor, 'his music is silenced now.'

Dr. Adams was, I suppose, very kind. He said all that ought to be said; that we must be tired; that we ought to go to bed. He hoped we would let him know if there was anything he could do for us. 'I imagined you would

have gone straight to Meyringen,' he said. 'Miss King is with Fina all day. The Hôtel is quite full, and the child is staying at the convent. She is quite well, she knows the nuns, but it will do her good to see friends. I suppose you will wish to go to her the first thing in the morning,' he added. 'This man will see about a carriage for you. He is an intelligent fellow, and understands these things better than I do.'

After the first moment of emotion, as soon as he had time to remember, he seemed to become embarrassed and cold. His estranged voice filled poor Josephine's brimming cup. She got up, tried to stand, and fell back into the chair.

The porter who had let us in put out a strong arm, and helped Josephine, still half fainting, to her room. I saw the Doctor make a half motion to come to our assistance, but he drew back almost immediately.

'Good-night,' he said, looking hard at Josephine for an instant, and then he walked back through the open window to the balcony.

'The Herr Doctor's room leads from the balcony,' said the man. 'I can bring the lady tea. I have hot water. Tea is good when you are tired.'

Here was this casual porter helping us with friendly cheer, while he who should have done more than all the rest to befriend my poor Josephine went off with his odious pipe. I was in a rage with the Doctor.

IX.

I rose early next morning with a purpose in my mind, and dressed myself and knocked at Josephine's door, but she was not in her room and did not answer. It was a bland and lovely morning, with indescribable peace in the air and in the dawning sunlight. This peace and tranquillity seemed everywhere, in all the place, on the steep slopes, on the wide shining valleys, on the clear mountain line that seemed carved against the chill sky. I needed not to ask my way to the church. I walked quietly up the village street and across the bridge that spanned the stream. I could see the quaint-shaped spire with its leaden nightcap at the turn of the road. The church stood in its sacred little garden, the shadows of the many crosses and footstones were slanting on the turf, the flowers were glistening with morning dew, so were some footsteps that had already crossed the grass. An old man was at work, feebly striking with an iron bar at the churchyard wall, and when I asked him to show me poor Arnheim's grave, he amid his blows raised one hand and pointed, saying in his German, 'That is the grave where the mourner is standing,' and then he bent to his work once more.

Josephine, the mourner, as the old man called her, stood very still, with clasped hands and a drooping head;

some quick, heavy, large tears were falling from her eyes —tears of pity, of remorse for the past; and few remembering tears, alas! are without some such salt in them. She held out her hand to me. It was only for a minute that we stood there, saying good-bye in our hearts to our old friend.

'I will try, I will try, to make up to Fina for all the things in which I have failed to them,' said Josephine, in a low voice; and then she burst out crying once more; then stopped short and wiped her eyes and looked up into my eyes, and her face looked very sweet. As we came back the little street was waking and bustling into the day; the first sweet blinding rays of morning light were dazzling and striking upon the stream and the windows of the houses; the mountain tops flashed; the mighty Wetterhorn seemed almost floating in early radiant mist. Other travellers were assembling in front of our hotel, where our carriage was already being prepared. Our friend the porter was at his post, discussing some point with a neat little old man in knickerbockers; a short stout lady, accompanied by an artistic-looking person in a cloak and a troubadour-like hat, was handing parcels to a guide and directing the loading of a mule. The coffee-room, which had seemed so silent and dreary the night before, was cheerful enough now, and full of clatter, which is not bad furniture in its proper place and time. One or two people were breakfasting at the little tables; jugs were

smoking, insects buzzing round about the honey-pots; an energetic waiter was chasing coffee-cups and wasps, and tumbling over the chairs and the breakfast-tables. John Adams, with a great pair of horn spectacles on, came into the room just after we had entered; he was evidently looking for us, and Josephine went to meet him. She had taken off her long cloak and was carrying it on her arm; her broad hat still shaded her face; her eyes were still soft with tears. She looked very sad and sweet, I thought, and she put out her hand.

'Perhaps you will soon come over to Meyringen and see us,' she said, simply. The great emotions of life, even its regrets, make people real, and not ashamed of being themselves for a while, and Josephine was herself at this moment.

I saw the Doctor brighten and look pleased. What he said I don't know, for I had many other things to attend to. I had to pour out the coffee, to ask for the bill, to add up all the little figures curling into strange 9's and 5's. But while I did the sum, some vision passed before my eyes. I could imagine this gentle womanly woman happy at last, and making others happy, in a home brightened by the warmth of its own warm hearth. For once, all seemed likely and propitious. I did not now regret the mistake which had brought us so far out of our way. Mistake—it seemed some friendly interposition of benevolent fate which had thrown us all together.

Our little carriage was waiting alongside a string of mules and horses drawn up for the use of some adventurous travellers who were starting on their day's expedition. The guides came stumping into the courtyard, dressed in their loose brown clothes; some little puppies were tumbling out of a stable, barking, and rolling over and over in the sun; some children came shyly to the door, offering Alpine flowers, brown stalks with yellow heads (which description, by the way, applies to the children as much as to their posies). As we drove off, I could see the whole cavalcade filing down the hill, across the torrent, and beginning to climb the steep staircase leading to the Little Scheideck. I could also see the Doctor standing watching us from the inn until the road turned. Josephine looked back once, and seeing him there, blushed crimson.

Putting the sad real purpose of our journey aside, I pleased myself for a few minutes with a little fairy tale, in which it seemed to me as if Fortune had amused herself by complicating feelings and people and sentimental interests into a hopeless tangle, and then, being in some good-natured mood, she had transported them all—perplexities, regrets (nothing is so hopeful in love-making as a little regret), into this sweet green valley, where amid the fragrant pines and the green Alps, and the gentle radiance of white and golden flowers and veils of soft verdure, to the soothing rush of mountain streamlets, and the solemn

serenities of white snow and clear-cut peak, fate ceases to be fate, and becomes kind and commonplace and homelike, and separations turn to meetings, and to fidelity; and sensitive humility and self-mistrust change to gratitude, to intelligent sympathy, and trust.

Our way lay by the Great Scheideck, as it is called, to Meyringen, which is but a day's journey from Grindelwald. You climb up into the clouds, you take breath at Rosenlaui, you descend into a deep valley, and there is Meyringen.

I believe that in all Switzerland there are few more lovely sylvan passes than that one between Grindelwald and Meyringen, by the baths of Rosenlaui. Part of the road lies through a wood, like one of Shakspeare's sylvan forests, and then you travel on by noble downs to Rosenlaui, which is only a mountain inn near a glacier on the Meyringen side of the Upper Scheideck Pass, but it is a favourite resting-place with travellers. Here is food, here is wine. Here is shade to rest in after that burning climb along the rocky pass; the torrent foams along the gorge; mosses and sweet green things overflow its rocks; goats are browsing on the fine grass and flowers; delicate clouds from afar come floating along the rocky points, and clefts, and ridges. The sky burnt violet without a veil that day as we rode up and dismounted at the door. But though nature smiled upon us, our eyes were in no grateful mood; the thought of that terrible chance which had befallen poor

Arnheim haunted us at every step. It was midday when we reached the baths. The earlier part of the road had been trying; the sun was very hot, the mules were weary, and needed rest; and the way, to our impatience, seemed longer than it really was.

The host showed us up smilingly into the usual wooden dining hall, where two attendant Swiss maidens were coming and going with glasses of beer and country wine, and with smoking portions of kid suited to the tastes and purses of the travellers. Here, too, was the usual balcony or terrace, with a lovely spreading view of cloud-capped mountains, of rushing streams, and green pastures. The Wetterhorn is the presiding deity of this lovely valley.

I said something of the sort to Josephine, but she only answered: 'It seems as if all the mountains in the world were between us and Fina; we shall never get to her;' and then Miss Ellis impatiently pushed away the plate which had been put before her. While John Adams had been present she had borne the suspense with less difficulty. 'An hour's delay will not make much difference to the poor child,' I said, trying to calm her. 'Fina is with friends.'

'Friends!' she repeated. 'One can't count much upon friends—except indeed dear old tried friends like you. Friends keep away when they might be of comfort and of use. They come when they can only bring discord and

pain by their presence.' She spoke excitedly, and scarcely looked like herself.

'I cannot think why Dr. Adams did not come on with us a little way,' I said, in as matter-of-fact a voice as I could muster.

'Don't you see that he only left because we were expected,' said Josephine. 'He said as much when I asked him if he would not come over and see us,' and she looked at me hard.

There are times when one would be thankful to be wiser than fate, to say some word by which to reconcile and explain away facts as inexorable as these mountains on either side; but I could think of nothing. I was too much disappointed to pretend not to understand. I could only heap her plate with wood raspberries by way of showing my sympathy. We were not the only occupants of the big *salle*. All the while we had been talking a voice had been scolding steadily from the balcony outside, while at the other end of the room a couple of athletic clergymen, dressed in a certain grey and black plaid which the clergy affect on their travels, and with beards, and with a trophy of umbrellas and knapsacks between them, sat enjoying their cutlets and their subdued jokes. The scolding voice on the balcony was anything but subdued—'Well, then, you should have seen that it was in time. It is inconceivable. I desire you to see that the mule is ready—and I am kept waiting, ten minutes, who knows, ten hours.

Ring the bell (ding dong). Do you call that ringing the bell? Ring hard, or they never come (ding dong, ding dong). Mossieu, Mossieu! Vien ici! Why have not they brought my mule? What does he say, Eliza?' 'He says it is there, Aunt Matilda, waiting in the shade.' 'Really, Eliza, I sometimes think you mean to laugh at me. Now then, do think of something for yourself. Get me my *capote* and my large *ombrelle*, and do not be an hour about it.' Then came a tap of heels, and two women bundled across from the window to the door.

How vividly I can see it all. At the time the scene made but little impression upon me. Now, as I think of it, the figures rise before me like the witches' ghosts in 'Macbeth,' and the midday heat, and the scolding voice, and the hum of wasps, and the sense of the great and lovely world without, all overshadowed by the thought of the poor little daughter waiting in the valley below. That poor child's tears dimmed the splendour of the summer day.

We reached Meyringen, stumbling and sllding down the precipitous road, walking most of the way, and only mounting again at the foot of the pass. Meyringen lies in a valley among battlements of granite, natural outposts of rock, boundaries that enclose you on either side. The Grimsel rears its stony forts across one far end; only to the west do the rocky gates seem to open out, where the sun sets radiant, unconfined, over lakes and across gentle slopes, where distant towns gleam by distant waters.

Holiday-makers from the north and the west come up this valley on their way to Italy, and struggle over rocks and snow and dreary heights into shades of chestnut—into the languor and wonder of Italy. Notwithstanding the icy gates of snow and rocks that separate Meyringen from that happy land of Goshen, whither we all turn wistfully at one time or another, some flash of Italian sunshine seems to play upon the village, with its vine-bound galleries and windows, on the pretty square terrace and the balconies of the inn and its flight of stone steps upon which we dismounted.

X.

The usual guard of honour turned out to receive us—landlord, landlady, the cook from the kitchen, the waiter from his kingdom of knives and forks.

'Here you are,' cried Mrs. King's shrill little cracked voice from a balcony, from whence she waved her pocket-handkerchief, and through the midst of them came another figure, Sophy King herself, in her muslin dress, with a straw hat on her head, carrying something in a little covered dish, which she set down quickly when she saw us, and came with two wide cordial arms flying to meet us.

'At last,' said she, 'at last. Where did you go to, you

poor things? We were almost despairing of you when Dr. Adams telegraphed this morning to say you were coming. Dear Fina is longing to see you. I have not left her since her good Doctor went away. He waited until he heard of Miss Ellis coming.'

I could not think what odd change had come over Josey. She began a set speech to my annoyance, something about—'I am sure my mother and I have every reason to be greatly obliged to you for your great kindness to Fina. I hope you will now be relieved from your watch.'

'Relieved!' said Sophy, greatly hurt. 'I don't want to be relieved, though I was glad you were come. Would you wish to go to her or to refresh yourself first?' she asked, with some shade of sarcasm. 'If you like, I will go on and tell her you are coming, and the landlord will show you the way.'

'We will come with you,' said I hastily, 'dear Sophy. It has been such a comfort to think of her with you all this time.'

'You know she is in the convent,' said Sophy, relenting a little; and then going back for the covered dish, she added: 'The nuns' fare is rather austere, so I get the landlady to help it out. The convent is close at hand.' And so saying she set off quickly.

I seemed to hear voices buzzing on every side, and people saying that the friends of the poor young lady had

come. One person and another joined on to our little procession, still headed by Sophy carrying her dish. Then came Josephine, silently following with her silk dress trailing; she looked stern and pale, I thought. At such a time, with such a meeting before, surely jealousy and egotism should have had no place in her heart, and indeed, by degrees her better self asserted itself; her looks changed and softened, the thought of the little lonely girl must have put out all others less worthy. Sophy once glanced at her over her shoulder, and then, seeing that she was crying, softened in a minute.

It seemed to me as if all the inhabitants of the hotel must have come down from their various balconies to follow us and our guide stumping ahead in her straw hat. She led us past the châlets and the balsam pots, past the church and the fountain, to the market-place, at the corner of which the convent stood. It was a curious tall house built upon piles or arches.

'Our sisters keep a school,' said the landlord, who had also joined us, having only waited to get his felt hat. 'They know Miss Arnheim well. Allow me, Missis,'—to Sophy, as he nimbly ran up the stone steps and rang the bell, conscious that the eyes of the whole company were upon him. Besides the people who had come along with us, were all those assembled in the wine-shop with the red curtains opposite. I could see eyes peeping curiously from between the flower-pots in the window and from the door-

way. The bell swung with a melodious deep clang, the low door opened, and the landlord, still leading the way, stepped into a cool passage painted in black and grey, and passed under grey stone arches leading to a steep wooden staircase, an oaken ladder leading to an oaken heaven, where some very dirty little angels were flapping their wings and scratching on slates under the supervision of a sister, who looked up smiling. She had a bright face framed in black muslin frills that seemed intended to shade bright eyes and rosy cheeks and the unholy radiance of health and youth that lingered in her smiling face. Perhaps this is an article in many of our creeds, and we are only too ready to consider as sacred those earthly veils of black, those cobwebs of dust and disappointment, that fall upon us all in our life's journey until one day we find that these too pass away.

'We are glad to see you,' said the nun kindly; 'the poor child will be glad. She is asleep; go up, go up.'

Fina, wearied out, had fallen asleep that hot autumn afternoon in the little bare room to which the kind and pitying nuns had brought her. The window was open; all night she must have seen the stars twinkling in the sky while she tossed to the distant roar of the mountain torrent; and now by day the sun streamed through the deep casement, half shut out by a green curtain, and the sound of the torrent came still, but softened by daylight and its many echoes. She had fallen asleep, tired out, lying on

the outside of her bed, with all her dark hair tangling on the pillow. She slept, and peace came, for she was smiling in her dreams. A round-faced sister standing in the doorway peeped at her, and gently crept across the room and drew back the blind. The child started, and awoke with a little exclamation.

'They are come, darling,' said Sophy, standing by the bedside, and flinging her arms round the little prostrate figure.

'Who are come?' said Fina, bewildered still. 'Is mamma come?'

Alas! 'they' only meant Aunt Josephine—only meant me, a poor helpless old governess. Fina did not repel us, though she broke out crying again. She rose slowly from her bed in her long white dressing-gown and came to meet us, and lay in Josephine's close-folding arms.

'Oh, yes! you are like mamma,' said Fina. 'She used to kiss me as you do.' Then she went on: 'Just now I was dreaming, and I thought papa was giving me a music lesson, and mamma came with the light and I awoke. It must have been the light from the window when the nun drew the curtain back.'

Poor little maiden! Though veils and frill caps do not seem to me sacred, though lighted candles seem little worth the solemn protests of belief which are given to them, other symbols there are, other signs and sacraments, which few among us do not acknowledge. A child's trust

and admiration for its home relics and beloved home saints, a father's ceaseless, tender, protecting love, seem to me among the most holy things of life. These simple creeds and early unquestioning beliefs are not less true because, as time goes on, other things less complete, less easy to understand, less home-like—arise. The day comes, indeed, when children leave their mother's arms and their father's sheltering care; they have to struggle for themselves, to accept doubts, and disappointments, and perplexities—some human, some ghostly; but not the less true are these simple traditions because of the wider and more complicated experience of later life. There is something almost supernatural in this book of childhood, of common things and common people made wonderful to the love of baby eyes.

It was fortunate we came when we did, for almost immediately after our arrival Fina fell ill. For ten days the poor child, parched by burning fever, lay tossing in her little convent room. I telegraphed to Dr. Adams, who had gone back to Interlaken, and who came at once. His presence was the greatest help and comfort to us all. What did we not owe to his skill and perseverance as day after day went by? It was a curious phase of existence. The little nuns, who were kindness itself, let us come and go as we liked, while they kept their monotonous and peaceful rule. We could hear the hymn from the chapel as we sat by Fina's bedside. Sometimes it seemed to keep

time to the mountain thunders, for the weather was unsettled during Fina's illness, and storms were constantly breaking.

The Doctor always spoke very cheerfully, and declared that his patient was much too well nursed not to recover; and, indeed, the result proved that he was right.

The first time that Fina was out of danger, I left Sophy King beside her, and went with Josephine for a little stroll through the village air. As we passed the clockmaker's shop, the Doctor came out, stooping over some glasses he held in his hand, which he was trying. He looked up quickly, nodded, and smiled gravely as we went by, but did not speak. Josephine flushed, as she always did when she saw him.

'He has gone back to his experiments,' I said, 'now that he is no longer anxious about his patient. As Sophy says, Fina certainly owes him her life.'

'Dr. Adams attributes Fina's recovery to Miss King's wonderful nursing,' said Josephine; 'she repays his compliments.'

What childish creatures human beings are after all, and how oddly that which somebody else prizes or despises gains or loses in value in our eyes. Poor Josephine did not need any one to teach her to love John Adams, as I knew better than Sophy did; but she had not been able, so it seemed to me, to appreciate him hitherto. She would not own it, and yet Bessie's supercilious strictures

must have had a certain effect upon her mind. That is just the difference; people can influence our minds, but not our hearts. They can prevent us doing justice to the powers of others; but they cannot prevent us from feeling in unison with them, from realising certain inexplicable links that bind us mysteriously together.

The Doctor, for some time, seemed unaware of the jealousy between the two, and went his way; but one day, coming in upon a discussion, he spoke very sharply to Josephine, who had refused to give up her place by Fina's bed when Sophy's turn for watching came round.

'A good nurse not only knows how to watch her patient,' said he, 'but when to leave her post; she takes rest when necessary, and does not give unnecessary trouble to other people.'

Josephine got up at once, but I met her in the passage in tears soon after. Poor soul! her heart yearned after the child, and she would gladly have carried her away from every one of us.

These troublesome confusions of life are among its most painful experiences, the too much which is no less vexing than the too little. Things which might have brought so much blessed joy and tranquillity only seemed to lead to pain and complications.

I remember walking home to the hotel one night, and speculating as to what might have been if only the Ellises had behaved in a more reasonable manner. Nobody's

feelings would have been wounded, not even my poor Sophy's, who would never have come across this Doctor at all. If anything could have added to my annoyance, it was a letter from Mrs. Ellis, which I found waiting for me in the bureau, directed in her pretty, old-fashioned writing.

'If I were not afraid of being more hindrance than help, I would come off at once,' the old lady wrote. 'My heart is with you, and with little Fina, and my child Josephine. Dearest Miss Williamson, I know I can trust your kindness and discretion. I hear from my daughter that Dr. Adams is at Meyringen. It is easy to surmise what has brought him once more upon the scene. Pray take care that my dear child is not carried away by any passing feeling of pity. He is a complete stranger to me and mine; he does not belong to anybody I have ever met anywhere. You can understand what my anxieties must be when I think of my poor girl's future, and how I have regretted this wayward fancy of hers. But all the same, it is possible, Rose says, that we may have been hasty in our conclusions; and if you should have an opportunity, pray give my compliments to Dr. Adams.'

And so, after behaving in this unconscionable manner, and insulting a person of whom we knew nothing, we were now prepared graciously to change our minds and send him our compliments. It was all very well, but I was far from certain that the Doctor had not changed his. The

Ellis family seemed to expect that the whole world was made for them and their excellences. On the whole it seemed to me that if the Doctor changed his mind it would not be a bad thing for him. Sophy would be much cleverer, more liveable, cheerful, and comfortable than Josephine, and might suit him a great deal better. Ah! what treason was this? Forgive me, solemn hills and stedfast ever fixed stars. Is love a bargain? Is it a bargain to be weighed and sold and bartered? or is it a blessing, a mystery, unexplained, granted to man in mercy, and coming to redeem and shape anew the pangs and sordid schemes of daily life?

My perplexities were solved by no less a person than Sophy's father, who rejoined his wife and daughter at the end of a week. He would not hear of remaining at Meyringen. 'Fina had her own friends,' he said; the place was close, very close, and stuffy; he heard there was a good cook at Rosenlaui; he wanted to get higher up. . . . Sophy, very loth, very reluctant, came with tears in her eyes to take leave of us all. It was a great pang to her to have to go just then. She said good-bye to me with tender effusion, to Josephine Ellis with scarcely concealed relief. 'You will write daily, and tell me about Fina,' said Sophy wistfully, and holding me by both hands. 'I can't bear to leave her.' And her eyes winked and radiated as they did when she was moved.

'She has the best of doctors, at any rate,' said Mrs.

King, wishing to console Sophy. 'And you know, Sophy, he has promised to come up and tell us about them all.'

'Then we need not trouble you with letters,' said Josephine quickly. 'You will hear all you want to hear from Dr. Adams.'

Sophy opened her eyes. 'You needn't write if you don't feel inclined,' she said good-temperedly; 'but I shall be always grateful for letters, and I will get everything ready for you when you come.'

'I beg your pardon,' Josephine said suddenly, all ashamed, and looking very charming as she came up and flung her arms round Sophy's neck and kissed her, and Sophy gave back her kiss with a friendly nod.

To be ugly is quite a different education from that of being beautiful. As a rule, ugly people are less shy, and much more polite than the beautiful; their friendship is perhaps less fastidious. Josephine was older than Sophy, but she knew far less of the world, she was more reserved, less able to battle with life. I had come to understand the poor Doctor's odd estrangement, and the meaning of a certain irritable manner which had puzzled me at first.

The Doctor, with all his simplicity, knew something of men and women. He was too observant, too much used to watch his plants and his insects, not to mark peculiarities in the people among whom he lived. Sophy's undisguised warm-hearted admiration was touching, but bewildering too. Here was a woman all ready to love him,

and there was the woman he had loved. Shy, prim, jealous, not indifferent as I knew—but how could he know it—perhaps he could not help contrasting the two, not always in Josephine's favour. And in the same way Fina loved her aunt already with something of the sweet wayward worship she had given her mother, but Sophy was her friend and playfellow and companion. Poor Josephine felt as if here, too, Sophy came between her and her heart's desire.

One day there was a great storm; the thunder echoed overhead among the mountain peaks and crannies. Then a mist rolled down, darkening and hiding everything from our eyes. Then the rain fell in steady torrents, pouring and increasing hour by hour. At last the rain ceased, and the curtain of mist was raised.

A new valley was revealed; a great river was thundering past the village; it was the stream overflowing, swollen and frothing in fury. Undine-like waterfalls suddenly improvised were streaming upon the mountain sides. I remember four little shepherd boys passing by, driving their splashing goats up the village. The boys were all of them drenched with the rain, but laughing as they shook the streams from their skins and broad felt hats. The storm ended as mysteriously as it began, and our little patient, who had been more ill all day, and more oppressed, suddenly revived that night, and seemed to shake off her trouble.

When the Doctor saw her early next morning he said the fever was gone, and that the sooner we moved her now the better. 'All the more,' said he, 'that I have to leave you to-morrow, and I should be glad to see you safe at Rosenlaui before I go.'

I should have been glad if any other place but Rosenlaui could have been selected for Fina's convalescence, but it was the nearest and the most obvious place to go to, and the little thing was longing to rejoin her friend.

XI.

So we took leave of our friendly nuns, who came about us in their veils to say good-bye. Fina, from her chair, waved her thin hand to the sisters as they stood in the doorway and on the steps that led to it. The porters lifted her from the ground gently and started off smoothly at a rapid pace. The Doctor, with his green plant-box and his battered alpenstock, followed with long strides and many diversions on the road in search of one and another mysterious treasure, and my fat mule carried me bravely over the stones and up the steep. Josephine was also riding, but towards the end of the ascent she got down, seeing that Fina was alone, and walked beside her. Josephine had a knack of always being composed and graceful. She was little used to mountain ways, but it

was a pleasure to watch her as she flitted smoothly ahead. Once or twice Dr. Adams came up and spoke a word to her, but only a word. He seemed absorbed in his collections, and so indeed was Josephine in Fina's comfort. The two were silent and preoccupied. When we had gone about two-thirds of our way we saw a figure beckoning and waving welcome on a rock round which the road went. Need I say that it was our friendly Sophy come to meet us, and not in the least preoccupied, but heartily engrossed in our journey and our progress? She had put on spectacles in order to make us out the sooner. She wore a pork-pie hat. She held a stick in one hand and a basket in the other. She had clumping boots and a stout heavy petticoat of some discoloured plaid. She was flushed with her exertions, having climbed the steep rock to see further ahead. The path was scarcely a safe one for a young lady, though it might do very well for a goat or a little boy. Sophy looked not unlike a sturdy little goat herself at that instant, as she came hopping down to the path below.

'I brought some food, in case Fina should want refreshment,' said Sophy; 'but how much better she looks.' At the sight of Sophy, spectacles, pork-pie hat, and all, the dear little patient face had lighted up with something of its old delight. Sophy's coming now made some difference in the order of our going. Miss King laid her hand on Fina's chair and walked beside it, and Josephine fell back and followed with Dr. Adams. Every step seemed to

bring new life into Fina's pale face. What a sweet progress that is from the valley to the mountain. The pine-trees looked drenched after the storm, but the torrent has already gone down; the rocks glisten; strange little new mountain torrents come from the heights of the ravine, over which soft handfuls of fleecy cloud are drifting gently and half asleep. Though it is late, and the sun has reached the valley, it seems quite early still, and as though the day was not yet begun for us. Last night the rocks and stones in the bed of the torrent were covered by the stream, but all is tranquil again. The waters flow with their accustomed measure—a sort of gay dancing measure, in the time of an old-fashioned valse. A little goat followed us browsing the dripping grasses and flower-heads. It was a sentimental creature, with a fancy for white flowers, *millefoil* and wild celery I heard the naturalist call them. We watched its nimble black lips with an odd fascination as it cropped them one by one. 'It came after me all the way,' cried Sophy, triumphant; and Fina smiled a real first childish smile of delight and interest.

Sophy and she seemed at home in this sweet native land. Sophy gave Fina a bunch of wild thyme she had pulled up on the road. She seemed to have some natural affinity for all this mountain life, for the morning visions, for the clouds that rolled down the green dripping flanks of the mountains, among fragrant tree stems and all sweet things. What a green garden it is, in which the goats

travel from rock to rock, browsing as they go, cropping leaves and choosing out of the delicate fantastic abundance. Sophy, too, had gathered some of this from among the strawberry rocks in the fir wood. Her pockets were full of cones and of berries of one sort and another, of oak-apples and of some golden fungus that had caught her fancy. I heard her telling Fina wonderful stories as she walked along, of a little lizard bronzed and lazy, hanging on a bank, and of a terrible apparition—a big toad—she had seen that morning hopping from the root of a tree.

Mrs. King was again looking out of the window when we reached the hotel, and waving her languid handkerchief. I remember the Doctor's eyes following Josephine as she crossed the threshold, and passed in through the doorway. Her cheeks were aglow, her eyes alight, she was touched and awakened to a strange new beauty. Sophy, who loved beauty, whose own clumsy ways were a positive pain to her, also watched her for a moment, and an odd expression passed across her face. Then she rallied, took off her spectacles, and gaily calling out, 'This way, this is Fina's room,' quickly led us down a passage, knocking over a great jug on her way. She had everything ready, wonderfully arranged and prepared, and a snowy restful bed wide open for the little invalid to slide into.

That afternoon, little Fina being safe asleep in bed, under the care of Pringle, we three ladies strolled across the meadow in front of the hotel, and made for a little

wood house by the stream, where long fragrant planks still wet with resin lay ready for the builder's hand. Saws and sawdust, shavings, all the scraps and surplus of the place seemed equally fragrant. Sophy sat perched upon some planks, Josephine was standing in the doorway looking out, I found a comfortable seat on a heap of logwood. There was a delicious sound of water in our ears, for the stream dashed past quite close by; the waterfalls after the storm came gaily pouring from the mountain; everything, indeed, seemed alive—passing, floating, drifting, breathing, the very wind was life-giving. Suddenly comes a stir among the planks; a little calf had been hidden among them, and trotted swiftly away, escaping into the field. There seemed to be some swift goodwill and fitness in every natural thing round about us, which put us all into good spirits for the moment. Sophy made some joke, and burst out laughing; Josephine smiled; some one came to the door and looked in.

'You look very comfortable,' said the Doctor. 'I shall envy you to-morrow, when I get back to my cockney home.'

He looked much more like a dweller upon mountains than anything else, as he spoke—a tall, lean, hairy man, with those marvellous bright glances of his. They might certainly have made any young lady's fortune. Josephine's glances were scarcely less bright in the cheerful excitement of the moment—of Fina's recovery, of the pleasant change of scene. The moment seemed propitious for me

to speak up. 'Dr. Adams, I have never given you a message. Mrs. Ellis wished me to give you her compliments.'

'And won't you go and see mamma in her cockney home, and give her news of us?' said Josephine.

'I am a busy man,' said the Doctor. 'I shall not have much time for visits when I get back.'

He did not say it rudely, but I saw Josephine change colour. Sophy looked up quickly; there was a moment's dead silence.

'Do you know this?' said the unconcerned Doctor, holding up a little flower to Miss Ellis. 'I have often read of it; I never saw one till I came here. It is a certain kind of astrangia. It puts me in mind, I don't know why, of a delicate old maid. These flowers have all characters of their own; one can never tell what may not be going on when one ties up a bunch and sticks it into a glass.'

I set him down—vexed though I was, I could not help being interested in this doctor—as a romantic independent man, with a vein of common sense, and wondered what flower would best describe him. Wild thyme came into my mind somehow, for, though I was provoked with him, it was impossible not to do justice to his simplicity and many gifts. My Sophy was another plain-looking flower, with a fragrant perfume of good heart and wit. She was certainly not much to look at. There she sat on her log, with her feet hanging, and her plain good-humoured round

face; not one grace, not one mystery of expression to give a charm to her dumpy figure. And there was Josephine, who, without a thought or a wish, looked all that Sophy would have so gladly *said*—Josephine who, by turning her head or raising her hand, seemed to be able to speak a whole life's emotions.

The Doctor never in all his life talked more delightfully than he did on that occasion, except, perhaps, after dinner that evening, when we all sat lingering in our places in the wooden dining-room, to hear him across the filberts and macaroons. His acquaintance and familiarity with the world of nature seemed extraordinary even to me, an ignorant outsider, but the charm of his description reached us all—a child could have understood what he said. He began with the plants and the flowers growing all round about; he described their characteristics, their habits, their ways of thinking and behaving. Then came the turn of the insects, and the very worms in the ground, as he talked, put out their wings. The whole beautiful world seemed to live again a new Paradise, a new dispensation from a still more lovely and wonderful point of view. Is this the secret of Paradise regained? Paradise re-entered a second time by patient effort, by humble and modest interpretation, by knowledge, by the toil of man; evil and corruption surmounted and explained by the life-enduring labours of a watchman faithful to his post, and counting the atoms as they evolve, and revealing their secret of life.

Josephine's cheek had caught some faint flush of excitement. Sophy laughed right out with enthusiasm. 'I never knew any one who knew anything—everything—before,' she cried.

Dr. Adams was almost annoyed.

'I,' he said, 'I know nothing comparatively. You should try and meet my friend B., who has followed the evolution of points absolutely undiscernible hitherto with the strongest glasses, and hear what he has to tell you. There's C., who, after years of the most magnificent work, has reached whole systems shining far beyond our fixed stars, and subject to *a different law*. Such things make one feel,' he said simply, 'like a child putting a few toys side by side in a row.'

I shall never forget that evening upon the mountain, as we sat at the dimly-lighted table in the big room with its dark corners. The clock struck nine while we were still listening to the Doctor's voice rising and falling. Sophy was absorbed with her cheek on her hand, Josephine all stirred, wondering, admiring, faintly blushing, and for once quite carried out of her usual ladylike composure. As the clock struck nine Dr. Adams moved his chair.

'I start very early to-morrow,' he said. 'I will go up with your leave and see my patient once more. You had better come,' he said to Josephine; and she, too, rose, fetched a light from a side table, and then some sudden

shyness, some self-consciousness, made her turn and come back to me and put the lighted taper into my hand.

'I will follow immediately,' she said.

I don't know whether he noticed it or not; he walked away with his hands in his pockets.

Little Fina was awake when we came into the room, quiet, lying comfortably. She did not know that the Doctor was going, as she said a drowsy good-night. He gave us a few last directions, standing in the passage outside.

'Fina will miss you. We shall all miss you,' said I.

'Poor child!' he answered, with his kindest voice and look. 'Poor little thing! She will have friends and a good aunt to look after her. Don't you let that sister of yours bully her when you get back,' he added, turning to Josephine as she came up the passage. 'Remember it is your duty to protect the little girl now.'

Miss Ellis looked half pleased, half angry. 'Why do you speak in this way?' she said. 'You don't suppose—— You don't know my sister.'

'I *do* know her, very well,' said the Doctor, remembering that scene in Old Palace Square.

It was almost impossible not to smile. But Josephine was wounded; anything from him touched her too closely. She tried to speak, she burst into tears, and running into her own room, which was next to Fina's, shut the door, and appeared no more that night. I hoped he might

have left some friendly message for her, but he did not. He said good-night, and walked away swinging his arms.

Very early in the dawn I awoke, and heard low voices and footsteps under my window. It was the Doctor starting on his homeward journey.

'Leben Sie wohl,' said the host; then some low, answering growl from a guide; then all was silent.

Next morning, at breakfast, I was amused to hear Colonel King say that 'that Dr. Adams was a very good fellow—no pretensions; and not one of those persons who are likely to force their acquaintance upon one afterwards.' Poor Sophy turned her face away.

The days went by very quickly after the Doctor left—green, or grey, or golden—bringing storm and sunshine in turn. They were all good alike, after their kind, and we were all the better for them. Nature is a wise and powerful friend. People come to her dizzy, and tired of the world of men and their anxious ways. Lo, the charm begins to work! You are no longer free; you belong to something calmer, greater than yourself. To all these drifting lights and fragrances, to these distant peaks, these shining rocks, 'souls attuned to sorrow' come up, rebelling even against sunshine. They are dazzled by it; it hurts their heavy eyes, long used to darkness and to tears. Lo! Nature interposes with her balm, her innocent, sweet arts, her green wreaths and tranquil visions. The river starting from the rock, the green pastures sprinkled with cattle,

interpose between you and haunting remembrance. You see your troubles through a vine wreath perhaps. Are you ashamed—provoked? That little brook babbling against its granite basin carries away the bitterness of your consternation. And so it was for Fina, and so, too, for Fina's aunt.

Three weeks take in a great deal of living, even though the time passes quickly. By the end of a fortnight Fina was out again, and something like her old self. At the end of three weeks we took leave of the Kings, who were bound to Italy.

'Good-bye, good-bye! Take great care of yourselves,' said Mrs. King, plaintively, as usual. 'I'm sure I wish I could persuade my Sophy to be a little more anxious about herself. She is quite well now, but one never knows what may be hanging over one.'

'Good-bye,' said the Colonel absently, and evidently glad to be rid of us. 'Keep a sharp look-out for your luggage at the station!'

'Good-bye, dearest friends!' said Sophy, bursting into tears. The parting was a real parting this time.

XII.

It is true that in England the senses are starved, light and colour and the abundance of life are wanting; but what is there is our own and suited to our tastes, we know

where to look for it. The defiles of London, its difficult passes, its chimney ranges and church tops are peculiar to us, its dull home face is homelike and friendly. Even Fina seemed not ill-pleased to be in the cab, jolting through endless streets on her way to Old Palace Square. Mrs. Ellis was standing on the steps of her house looking out for us, the kind old arms were wide open. I was for driving home, when they all called me peremptorily back.

'You must come in, dear Miss Williamson. Come in. My Bessie is away. I do hope I have got all that will be wanted, and that you will find the rooms warm enough after your journey.'

The house was stifling with the roaring fires the dear old lady had ordered in every room. The dining-room seemed prepared for a feast.

'Here's soup,' said Mrs. Ellis, looking round anxiously; 'or would you prefer tea or coffee? They are on the side table. Burroughes, have you brought up the champagne?'

'Mamma, whom were you expecting?' said Josephine laughing, as she looked at the heaped-up table. 'You dear absurd mamma!'

'Bessie would have known exactly what to do, my dear,' said Mrs. Ellis, humbly.

'And why is she away, and what have you been doing all alone?' said Josephine, suddenly realising her sister's absence.

'Bessie is detained at Cradlebury by her sprain,' said Mrs. Ellis. 'She came up for a day, but had to go back again, poor dear;' the kind old lady explained, with all her sympathy in her children's ailments. 'She rarely ventures out without an arm. Dear Bessie says she shall be glad of Pringle's help,' continued the old lady, carving nervously at a ham. 'She wishes her to take down the sewing machine and two or three numbers of *Myra's Journal*.'

'*Myra's Journal!*' said Josephine.

'She wants some patterns, and the key of the lace-box, which you put away, my dear. There is a good deal of company at dear Thomas's.' 'Very quiet company,' the old lady continued, turning apologetically to little Fina. 'Quite old people, like myself, for the most part, but they seem to dress a good deal. I was certainly a most shabby old granny, compared to Mrs. Blower, Rosa's aunt. I don't think you have ever seen her. She was there with her son, Captain Blower.'

'I dare say Mrs. Blower is a very gorgeous being, mamma,' said Josie, smiling. 'I'm sure she doesn't look half as nice as you do.'

Josephine was smiling; she was in a happy excited mood, which lasted that evening and for two or three days after. Then by degrees her smiles ceased, so did the musical, gay tones of her voice. The old anxious, harassed look returned, the old dull mantle seemed to fall upon her.

'She doesn't go out enough,' her mother said; 'for the last few days nothing will induce Josephine to leave the house.'

'That dear little Fina should seem sad at times was no wonder,' the old lady repeated wistfully one day, when I happened to find her alone; but really, of the two my Josie looks the most forlorn. I suppose one must not want too many things in this life, dear Miss Williamson, and it is for one's good to be disappointed; but I confess my wish would have been to see my children happy. What else could I care for; while their dear papa was alive my time was greatly absorbed; he was so very particular, and nobody else understood him as I did. I am sure I have always enjoyed my life hitherto, notwithstanding a great many trials. But it goes to my heart when I see my Josephine's sad looks.'

'Dear Mrs. Ellis,' said I, hesitating whether or not to speak, 'you know better than I do what life is, and its cares and its difficulties. Perhaps, since you ask me, I think that Josephine, who is so like you, might have been happier in some ways if her life had been more like yours. If, for instance, as you said in your letter, Dr. Adams had not been sent away, if—if—'

I was rather confused, for I was not sure whether it was not too late to speak.

'But I wrote to you,' said Mrs. Ellis, rather unreasonably, as I thought. People are not unwilling to let other

people take all the responsibility and bear all the blame if things go wrong.

'And I gave your message,' I said, 'but he is very proud in his way; and I don't think, unless he were actually summoned, that he would venture to come back.'

I saw the dear old lady's brown eyes look so wistful that my heart rather smote me for what I had said. I remembered her age, her delicate health. I saw her hands trembling. I was grateful for the diversion of an opening door, and little Fina's sweet face appearing in the doorway.

The old house in the Square seemed wonderfully warmed and brightened by the presence of this one little new inmate. Fina seemed to have come to awaken not a sleeping princess, but a drowsy old grandmamma. Burroughes himself had begun to rub up the plate with fresh spirit, the coachman seemed to whip up his horses, the little pug-dog, instead of dozing whole days by the fire, was actually to be seen trotting round the garden at Fina's heels. Fina used also to take her grandmother out on sunny mornings; I used often to see them, strolling side by side, or sitting on the bench in the Square garden. One day an organ came up behind the railing, grinding out some air of Schumann which had found its way into its barrel, and at a certain note Fina suddenly began to cry, remembering all with a sharp and cruel pang.

Her grandmother could not understand what she meant at first, till the child explained.

'It was something papa used to like;' and then, before she could say any more, the faint camphor-fragrance of the old lady's Indian shawls seemed all about her, and the kind old arms were round her.

'Don't, don't cry; don't grieve, my child. Parents want their children to be happy. Oh, Fina, if you knew how they long for it—how I long for my children to be happy after I am gone! I have often thought of this since your father died. Fina, I never did him justice. I have often wanted to tell you so. I am afraid I was very hard to him.'

'Yes, darling grandmamma,' said Fina, touched to the heart, and clinging closer still to the gentle old lady.

From that day there was a tacit understanding between the two, a difference in little Fina, a look of repose and comfort which had been wanting before. The Doctor came one day to see his little patient.

'You are looking well,' he said; 'I see they are kind to you.'

He only stayed some five minutes, talking to Fina in the Garden-room, as we used to call the room on the ground floor, which used to be the schoolroom. Mrs. Ellis seemed displeased when she came downstairs and heard that he had been.

'Did not the gentleman ask for me or for Miss Josephine?' said the old lady.

'No, ma'am,' said Burroughes, with dignity and emphasis.

The Doctor would have gained nothing if he had asked for Miss Josephine. She was at Cradlebury. She had been mysteriously summoned by her sister-in-law, who wrote on pink paper, all over roses and R's. Josephine was to come at once, she said. No excuse whatever would be taken. Mrs. Ellis was to prepare herself for some most interesting news, and by the very next post came a second letter, containing the news, the most surprising, the most extraordinary, the—shall I say so?—most welcome announcement—Madame de Sévigné's pen could alone have done justice to our feelings on the occasion—the great Miss Ellis was actually engaged to be married. The Captain, the Colonel's travelling companion, Rosa's cousin, Mrs. Blower's only son, boots, settlements, faultless whiskers, the arm that had supported Miss Bessie's faltering steps, the hand about to lead her to the altar—all were to be found united in the person of Bessie's future husband, Captain Blower of the Heavies. 'Some people think my cousin a little prosy,' the candid Rosa wrote; 'but Bessie delights in his society. They talk about horses and servants all the day long, and are evidently intended for each other.'

Josephine half laughed, half sympathised. Notwith-

standing her evident reluctance she could not refuse to go. Poor Josephine! She was sorry to be away, and not much interested in Blower. Fina was left alone to the care of Mrs. Ellis. Indeed, it was the best thing that could have been desired for the little girl. Something to do, somebody to want her, was the way to comfort the poor little heart. Mrs. Ellis, who was a companionable and cheerful person, and who occasionally suffered from her children's excessive care, enjoyed the liberty and brightness which Fina unconsciously brought, the echo of music from distant lands. the outburst of irrepressible youth emerging from grief.

XIII.

I was amused to hear Fina catechising her grandmother one evening in the most unhesitating manner. 'Grandmamma,' she said, 'do you suppose Aunt Bessie is in love?'

'I suppose so, my dear,' said her grandmother. 'We shall hear all about her from Josephine.'

'Most people fall in love, don't they?' said Fina. 'When I do, I shall fall in love with a doctor. Oh, grandmamma! do you think perhaps some day it could ever happen that my dear doctor could marry Aunt Josie?'

'Has Josephine been talking to you?' said Mrs. Ellis.

'Aunt Josie never talks,' said Fina seriously. 'The Doctor told me he had thought a great deal about her; but that she didn't care for him. But, grandmamma, I think—don't you think?—he is mistaken.'

'My darling child, I don't want to think about such things,' cried grandmamma; 'they are not for little girls or old ladies, and the less Aunt Josie troubles herself about such things the better.'

'But who then should think about such things?' Fina was beginning; but Mrs Ellis desired her to ring the bell, quite crossly, and so the conversation came to an end.

One peculiarity about old people is that once they have made up their minds, they act very quickly. The day before Josephine was expected home, I found a note from Mrs. Ellis, saying she had something about which she wished to consult me, and would I come over to tea?

I found the old lady alone; she looked up as Burroughes ushered me into the room. 'Come here,' said she. 'What do you think of this?'

She was sitting at her old-fashioned desk, on which lay a sheet of paper, inscribed in her pretty handwriting. 'Is it about the wedding?' I asked. 'Have you been writing to your future son-in-law?'

'That depends,' said she. 'Read what I have said.' And she fixed her bright brown eyes upon my face.

The letter took me completely by surprise. It was not intended for Captain Blower.

'37 Old Palace Square: October 10, 1880

'DEAR SIR,—Not very long ago you honoured my daughter with a proposal which was not, I fear, received as it might have been by me and my family. I did not then know how deeply my own child's feelings were engaged in a matter which took me by surprise, and in which, I regret to think, I acted hastily, and with little consideration for any one but myself, and my natural dislike to parting with one so dear to me as she is. I am not too old yet to own myself wrong. My children's happiness is the one care that remains to me in this world, and I should not like to pass away with the thought of an injustice unrepaired which it is in my power to acknowledge, although perhaps too late to remedy. If you have not formed other interests, if your mind is unchanged, I should feel grateful if you would answer this letter yourself in person. I have not told my child that I have written to you, nor shall I do so without your authority. From what little I saw of you I feel I may trust you to keep my confidence, if it comes, as so many things do come, too late.

'Yours very faithfully,

'J. M. ELLIS.'

'There,' she said, emphatically, 'put it in your pocket;

post it as you go home with your own hands; and never speak of it again, unless I give you leave.'

I could only kiss the dear old hand which she held out to me. There was nothing to be said, but something—very much—to hope.

As the hour approached for Josephine's return, Mrs. Ellis grew more and more uneasy. No answer had come from the Doctor. It was almost more than the poor lady could bear.

Josephine came home, longing to be back on her own account; full of anxiety about them both, she found, with an odd heart-ache, how well the two could get on alone.

One of the first things Mrs. Ellis said to Josephine was, 'We have had a visit from your friend the Doctor since you left.'

'And what did he say, mamma?' Josephine asked.

'You must ask Fina, my dear. He did not care to see an old woman like me, and went away almost immediately.'

'He was shy, mamma. You know every one must be glad to see you. Captain Blower came up all the way from Cradlebury on purpose.'

Then Josephine went on blushing: 'Dr. Adams was very kind to us in Switzerland. I think it seems ungrateful to show him no attention. Do you mind asking him to dinner?

'What should we ask him to dinner for?' said Mrs. Ellis uneasily.

'Don't you think he might—he might like to meet Bessie and the Captain?' faltered Josephine.

The old lady laughed maliciously. 'If he is such a shy person, I should think he would much rather not.'

'Oh, do have him!' said Fina, bursting in. 'Do let me write!'

I did not recognise Mrs. Ellis, she spoke so sharply, and so beflustered. 'Certainly not, my dear. Your aunt and I can write our own letters.'

Fina sat down quite crushed.

'Then shall you write, or shall I?' said Josephine, holding her own. But it was a great effort to her to do so; her cheeks were burning, and her eyes were full of tears.

'It is not my wish that Dr. Adams should be asked to dine here at present,' said her mother decidedly; and the old lady went off, leaning on Fina's arm.

Poor Josephine! I hardly liked to look at her. We were both quite silent for a moment; then suddenly she burst out, 'It's too unkind. Why is every one against me? Indeed,' she added bitterly, 'mamma has little reason to forbid our meeting. The fancy he had for me has entirely passed away. I can't understand it at all,' she said passionately. 'Sometimes it has even seemed to me that only one other soul, only one, could interpret my own

soul to me. I did not know until I sent him from me how I depended upon him, not only for affection, but for a sort of very existence. It seemed so wicked at the time, one feeling, and one only, and all the rest left behind. And now—now it seems wicked to have turned from it.' She hid her face in her hands as she spoke.

'You could not really care even for one person,' said I, 'if you did not bring the power of affection which has grown with a lifetime. When you marry, you will love your husband all the more, because you have not thought of him only.'

'Marry!' she said, starting up; 'do you suppose I could ever marry any one else?' And I remember her face lighted as she spoke. 'I should like to see him again, if only once; just, just to see him, and to know how he is, and to hear what he is doing. Bessie has had no difficulties in her way.' She spoke in her pathetic voice with that strange openness of reserved natures. 'Your mother has her reasons,' I began—

'I know her reasons,' said Josephine, bitterly; and she began to walk up and down the room.

'Come out,' said I. 'The fresh air will do you good. Will you come to Silver Street with me? I have a pupil waiting'

She put on her bonnet without a word, and came with me. It was like walking with some one in a dream, so little did she seem to notice my presence. We went up

Old Street and came out into the highway with its many carriages. I took her arm and looked right and left as we went along. We reached the opposite pavement at last, escaping the jolting dangers of the crossing. It reminded me of the day I had passed her long ago in the east wind, for at this moment the bells set off ringing overhead.

They were lowering a barrel at the public-house, and she hurried forward to avoid it. I was delayed for a moment, and as I stood waiting I saw her run up against a shabby gentleman in a strange abrupt fashion. He looked down with a quick bright flash, and exclaimed—and I could see his face though hers was turned away. It would be impossible if it were not true, but this is true; and of all the people in this vast city, of all the millions and thousands and hundreds of people, this was the only one; the one person whom half a minute before she had been wanting with the least hope of ever meeting. 'You!' I heard her cry—not for the first time.

'You!' he said. 'I was coming to see you.' And then and there in that miry thoroughfare, with all the cabs and carts jolting by, and all the shop-fronts staring at them, he took her hand and pulled it through his arm.

'Well, what does this mean?' said the Doctor to her, smiling, as they passed without seeing me.

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